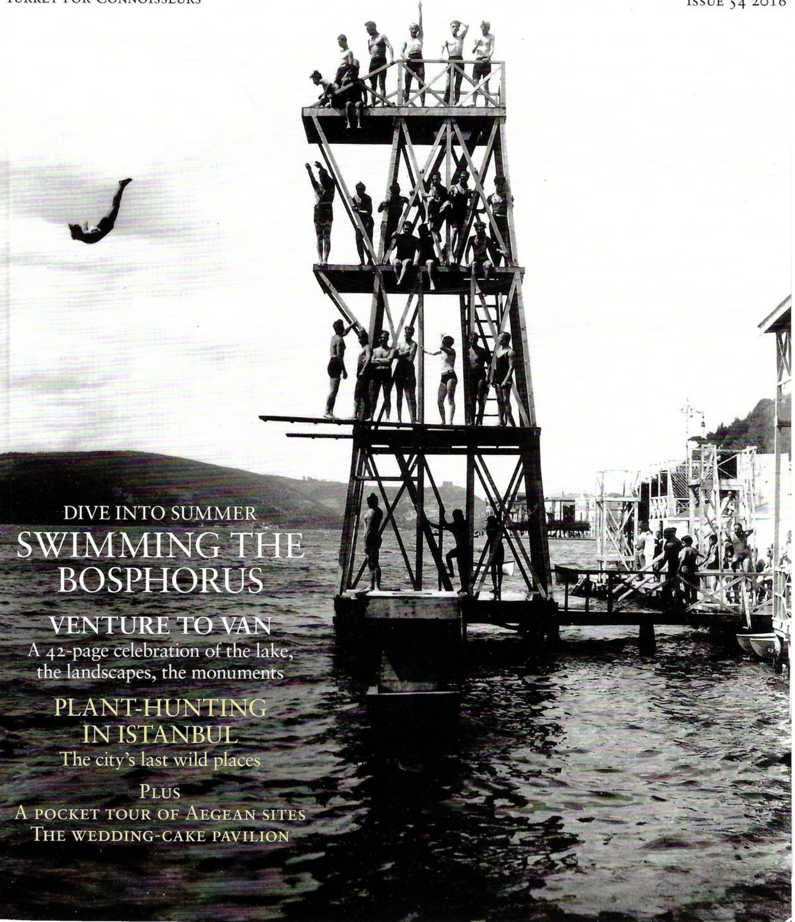
CORNUCOPIA

TURKEY FOR CONNOISSEURS

ISSUE 54 2016



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Cover Beyaz Park Plajı, Büyükdere, on the Bosphorus, c1930. See 'Going with the Flow', page 126
Photograph by Selahattin Giz © Yapı Kredi Selahattin Giz Collection

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THE ORIGINAL 'CORNUCOPIA'
The Latin *cornu copiæ* or 'horn of plenty', a horn overflowing with flowers, fruit and corn and a symbol of prosperity and abundance in the cities of Anatolia.

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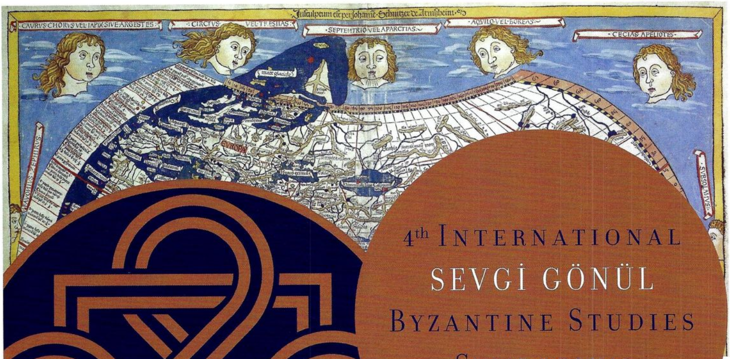
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CONNOISSEUR

A sparkling display of jewels at the Sadberk Hanim Museum,
Gordion's treasures in Philadelphia, the avant-garde artist who could never forget Turkey,
Thomas Hope drawings see the light in Athens, Istanbul's scents relived

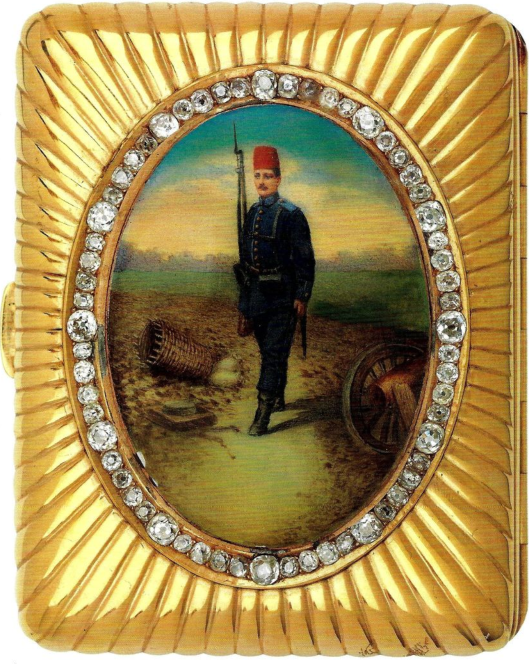
MANY A SPLENDID THING

The Ottoman love of jewellery is celebrated in a small but dazzling show

Afife Kadın, who had been a favourite of Mustafa II, dazzled Lady Mary Wortley Montagu with her fine array of jewellery when the great letter-writer visited her in Istanbul. "According to the common estimation of jewels," wrote Lady Mary in 1717, enumerating the jewels one by one, "in our part of the world, her whole dress must be worth above a hundred thousand pounds sterling. This I am very sure of, that no European queen has half the quantity."

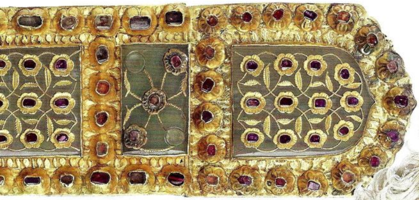
The Sadberk Hanım Museum celebrates its 35th anniversary with an exhibition that gives a glimpse of the opulence that surrounded the Ottomans. *Jewel* (*Cevher*) displays 139 exquisite items dating from the 16th to the early 20th century. Among the aigrettes, diadems and medals are everyday objects decorated with jewels – spoons, coffee-cup holders, mirrors, pipes, writing boxes, even fly whisks. Some were produced in imperial workshops and across the empire, others in Europe for the Ottoman market. But they all share a rare refinement.

The museum – one of the last wooden waterside mansions on Istanbul's European shore – is a gem in itself, small, sparkling and in a beautiful setting. Step upstairs to see the fine costumes that wore the jewels.



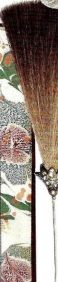
A gold cigarette box commemorating the parade for Kaiser Wilhelm II on his visit to Istanbul in October 1898. The painted enamel plaque of a Turkish soldier is encircled by old-cut diamonds

ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION

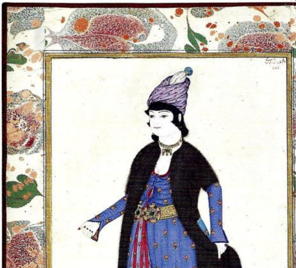


△ A tradition of jewellery design going back to the Turkic courts of Central Asia reached its zenith in Ottoman times. This splendid 16th-century gold belt-buckle from the Sadberk Hanım exhibition has jade plaques set with ruby-red spinels. Jade was used for many things, from spoons to archer's thumb rings

▷ This early-20th-century ostrich-feather fan has mother-of-pearl blades and a guard elaborately decorated with faceted diamonds and rubies, and a large emerald at the top set in a gold mount. The gold chain ends in a tassel of seed pearls



△ Head-ornaments were the must-have accessories of fine Ottoman dress. This stylish 19th-century plume would have decorated a woman's turban



◁ A fashionable young woman painted in the first half of the 18th century by the celebrated Abdullah Buharî. He pays particular attention to the eye-catching jewelled belt-buckle under her black mink coat – and her varnished fingernails

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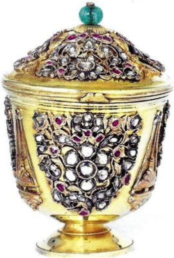
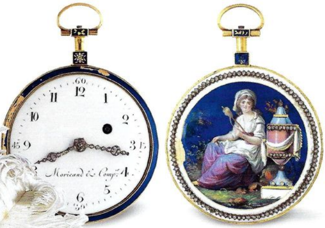
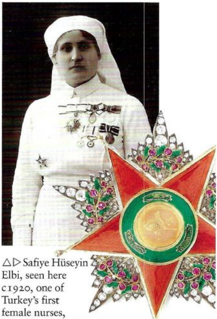


▷ A 19th-century mastic jar encrusted with rubies and diamonds, its lid topped by a large emerald. Chewed to freshen the breath, mastic was a luxury offered to special guests

IMAGES EXCEPT WHERE STATED: SADBERK HANIM MUSEUM

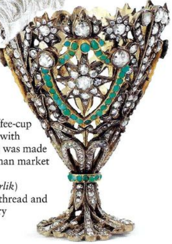


△△ An 18th-century Swiss watch by Moricand & Comp. Watchmakers in Europe thrived on the Ottoman passion for pocket watches. In her memoirs the composer Leyla Saz noted that in the 19th century every palace woman wore such a watch. Many of the dresses at the Sadberk Hanım Museum have pockets for watches sewn onto them



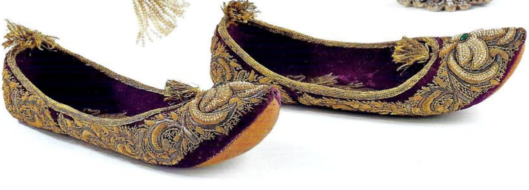
ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION

△▷ Safiye Hüseyin Elbi, seen here c1920, one of Turkey's first female nurses, wears, among other medals, the ruby- and diamond-studded Şefkat Nişanı, an order instituted for women in 1878 by Abdülhamid II (*şefkat* means compassion). Its motto was *İnsaniyet* (humanity), *Muavenet* (charity), *Hamiyyet* (patriotism)



▷ This 19th-century coffee-cup holder (*zarf*) encrusted with diamonds and turquoise was made in Europe for the Ottoman market

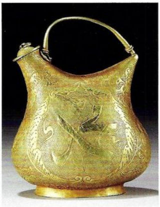
▽ Ottoman slippers (*terlik*) embroidered with gold thread and pearls. Also 19th-century



'Jewel: Enamelled and Jewelled Objects from the Sadberk Hanım Museum', until June 28; sadberkhanimmuzesi.org.tr (closed Wed). The catalogue, by Hülya Bilgi and İdil Zanbak, £32 from cornucopia.net

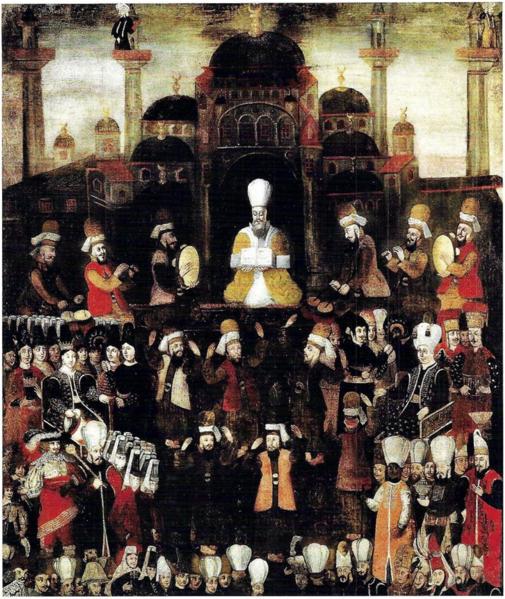
TREATS FOR THE SENSES

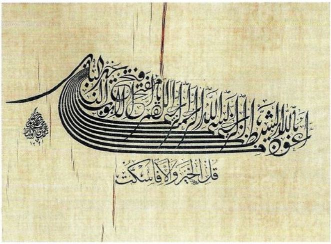
SALEROOM TREASURES AND THRILLING NEW ART FROM LONDON, ISTANBUL, ATHENS AND PHILADELPHIA



SPRING SPREE AT SOTHEBY'S

△ Flasks (*matara*) were a highlight of April's Arts of the Islamic World sale at Sotheby's in London. This tiny gold 18th-century Ottoman flask, just 10cm high (Lot 212), was used to carry precious water from the holy Zamzam spring in Mecca. It sold for £25,000. A 16th-century Iznik ceramic flask (Lot 85) made £389,000, six times the estimate





△ The enthronement of Osman II, by an artist travelling with the Austrian ambassador, Baron Mollard von Reinek, c1618. Osman, on the right, faces his mother (in the crown) – this was an age when queen mothers outshone their sons. Lot 83 reached £521,000, tripling its estimate.

◁ 'I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan', reads this elegant prayer in the shape of a boat, written on silk in 1878 by the calligrapher Mehmed Şefik Bey. Below it are the words, 'Say good things or keep silent'. Lot 28 sold for £7,500

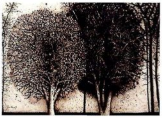
▷ Lot 118 was a long early-17th-century panel of Ottoman voided silk velvet (*çatma*); 142cm – 4ft 7in – in length, it fetched £27,500

ALL IMAGES SOTHEBY'S, LONDON

RETURN TO PERA

▽▽▽ *In Pursuit of an Artist: Istanbul – Paris – Istanbul* at the Pera Museum marks the centenary of an avant-garde artist born in Pera into a Greek-Italian family. Mario Prassinos moved from Istanbul to Paris in 1922, when he was 6, and lived all his life in France, but never forgot his birthplace. He is perhaps best known for his series *Turkish Landscapes.* To quote from his semi-autobiographical *The Tattooed Hill*, 'In these landscapes, there is always a tree or something resembling a tree or that can be taken for a tree. This is a memory of childhood... I wanted to revisit the image of a horizon cut by a tree, a tree that stands against the light.' Below are 'Trees' (1984) and 'Yellow-Red-Black Tree' (1962). *Pera Museum, Tepebaşı, Istanbul, until August 14; peramuseum.org*

CENTRE D'ARCHIVES MARIO PRASSINOS/YVES GALLOIS



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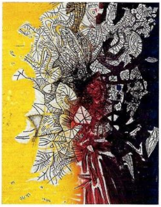
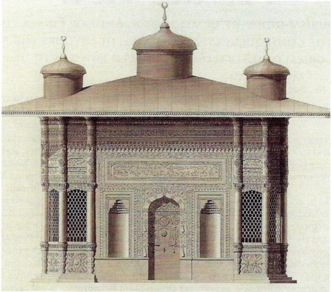


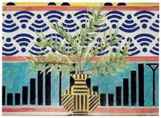
CENTRE D'ARCHIVES MARIO PRASSINOS. ALL IMAGES © ADAGP, PARIS



BENAKI MUSEUM, ATHENS

ATHENS AND THE EAST

△ Thomas Hope, father of Regency style in England, was one of the most talented artists to visit Istanbul. His minutely observed drawings of Ottoman buildings, such as the Topkapı's Fountain of Ahmed III (above), languished in the library at the Benaki Museum in Athens, thought to be engravings, until in 1983 curator Fani-Maria Tsigakou discovered that they were Hope's original drawings. They are currently on display at the museum. *Thomas Hope: Drawings of Ottoman Istanbul, until Sept 25; benaki.gr*



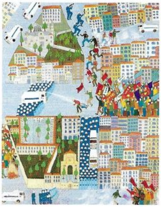
NAVINE G KHAN-DOSSOS

△ *Imagine a Palm Tree* is a room of murals in the café at the top of the Benaki's Islamic Art Collection. The title derives from Justine's words, 'I can't make love to you unless I imagine a palm tree,' in *The Alexandria Quartet* (1958) by Lawrence Durrell. The artist, Navine G Khan-Dossos – who has a special interest in Orientalism in the digital realm – is fixated on palms herself. Now based in Athens, she is still pondering the urban legend that the city's palm trees were uprooted three times for being too 'Oriental'. *Until Sept 2017; benaki.gr*

LIFE AFTER LIFE

From the fabulously wealthy city of Gordion in western Turkey, King Midas of the legendary golden touch held sway over Phrygia and nearby Assyria and Urartu c750–700 BC. The Penn Museum, Philadelphia, which has been excavating Gordion since the 1950s, is now staging an ambitious exhibition of artefacts from Turkish museums that have never before left the country. This silver figurine is probably of a priest (male, female, eunuch?) in the service of the goddess Cybele or Artemis. *The Golden Age of King Midas, until Nov 25; penn.museum*

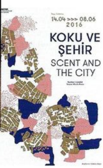
ANTALYA MUSEUM



CANAN/RAMPA

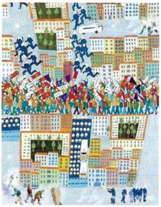
SCENTSCAPE

Sweet resin of rock rose pulled from the beards of reeking billy goats was one of the historic scents piped into the show *Scent and the City* at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations in Istanbul. Its aim was to awaken the sense of smell and its link to memory. Visitors could sniff smells of Anatolia since Hittite times, and those of Istanbul since Byzantine days, fair and foul, from lime blossom to lignite smoke. Curator Lauren Nicole Davis cites Bosphorus sea air and coffee as two scents that evoke the city for her. *RCAC, İstiklâl Cad 181, Istanbul, until June 8; rcac.ku.edu.tr. Future venues to be announced*



THE JAMEEL PRIZE

▽ The £25,000 Jameel Prize, awarded by the V&A Museum, London, for new responses to Islamic tradition, kicked off in Istanbul this time with shortlisted entries unveiled at the Pera Museum. The show will then tour the world, starting in London. The shortlist for the 4th Prize is kaleidoscopic. It includes *Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo*, riveting puppet theatre on HD video recounting the Crusades from an Arab perspective, by Wael Shawky from Alexandria, and the Turkish artist CANAN's *Resistance on Istiklal* (below), about the 2013 Gezi protests. *June 8 – Aug 14; peramuseum.org*



Private view

WITH TURKEY'S TOURISM INDUSTRY IN MELTDOWN, ANDREW FINKEL FINDS HIMSELF WITH MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES. MEANWHILE, HE SAVOURS THE BEST FOOD ON THE CITY'S STREETS, FROM GRILLED MEATBALLS AND STUFFED MUSSELS TO 'TOPİK' AND 'SİMİT'

My eyes deceive me

There is an optical illusion known as the "crowding effect" and I became aware of its existence not long after turning the corner onto İstiklâl, the busy pedestrian thoroughfare. "Normally busy" would be an accurate description, since the street, often too chock-a-block to walk comfortably, seemed unusually forlorn and deserted. Not entirely surprising, I thought, as I passed gingerly by the spot where two days earlier an ISIS suicide bomber had done his worst, claiming the lives of one Iranian and three Israeli tourists.

The bombing was not the first or even worst of its kind. In January a bomb in the historic centre of Istanbul appeared to target 12 German sightseers. Last October it was a peace rally in Ankara, where over 100 died. Such incidents, demoralising in themselves, have had a devastating effect on tourism – particularly when coupled with the Russian boycott of Turkish resorts, a reaction to the downing of a Russian jet that strayed from Syrian airspace. Up to a third of £21 billion in tourism revenue may have gone down the tubes this year, according to one estimate.

Yet, before my eyes, the crowds began to reappear. In the distance, at the far end of the street, it seemed as if all the cinemas had emptied at once. Stranger still, the throngs seemed to thin out as I approached. It was as if I were walking through a mirage. And then I realised: it was a trick of linear perspective, that looking into the distance is like peering through a zoom lens: the faraway landscape flattens. The street looked crowded because I could see everyone bunched up.

I would be lying if I pretended to being nonchalant. But even as I glanced anxiously from side to side, the actuarial muse hovering o'er my shoulder was telling me not to be so dumb. Statistically I was far safer walking down İstiklâl than commuting to work in the vicious Istanbul traffic – or probably even staying home to change a fuse.

Of course, what you know and what you feel are not the same thing. And I realise that "Come to Turkey; the probability you will not die in a terrorist attack is well nigh overwhelming" is not the stuff of which advertisement campaigns are made.

Were it not for the despicable and cruel reason, I might confess to a tinge of satisfaction at the falling off in tourism. Far too much of that industry in Turkey is fuelled by trashing the environment.

The problem is that lack of custom affects both the unjust and the just: the hideous concrete holiday bunkers that desecrate the coastline, but also the seasonal workers they employ; the imaginative boutique hotel owner, the hard-working vintner, the young chef who wants to do something no one has done before, have invested their lives and their savings, and all that is now at risk.

Despite my apparent sangfroid, I was secretly relieved to be going abroad the next day and taking a break from all the tension. Alas, I didn't get far. Twiddling away the minutes with Twitter on the shuttle bus from the terminal at Sabiha Gökçen to the plane, I saw the news. Suicide bombers had rocked Brussels airport, my destination. Belgium was in lockdown. I ended up having to retrieve my luggage and head back home.

The thing about perspective is that how things look is relative to where you stand.

Tastes of the street

One of the older residents in my neighbourhood hobbled past the new generation of pavement restaurants that have mushroomed along the main street, tut-tutting as she went. Talking to herself in a voice loud enough for all to hear, she complained that in her day it was considered impolite to eat in front of others who might be hungry. I suppose that sense of consideration may explain in part why café culture, or even a tradition of street food, is not as developed as it might be in Turkey. Another explanation is that zealous municipal officials are all too ready to pounce on anyone selling food without a licence.

This made it something of a challenge when I was asked to do a piece on the delights of Turkish street food. So I was pleased when by coincidence a small parcel arrived in the mail – an offering from food critics I respect, Culinary Backstreets, who publish *Istanbul Eats* and are dedicated searchers after the authentic. Not for them blackened sea bass in a pool of almond purée tinged with *lungo decaffeinato*, dished up at a showy press dinner sponsored by Nespresso. They celebrate the mom-and-pop local eatery, cooks loyal to a tradition, and (in this case) street vendors committed to doing one thing and doing it well. What the postman had delivered was a series of *Usta All-Stars* flash cards. *Usta* means master, and the laudable aim is to teach Istanbulites to cherish street food as part of what UNESCO calls "intangible cultural heritage".

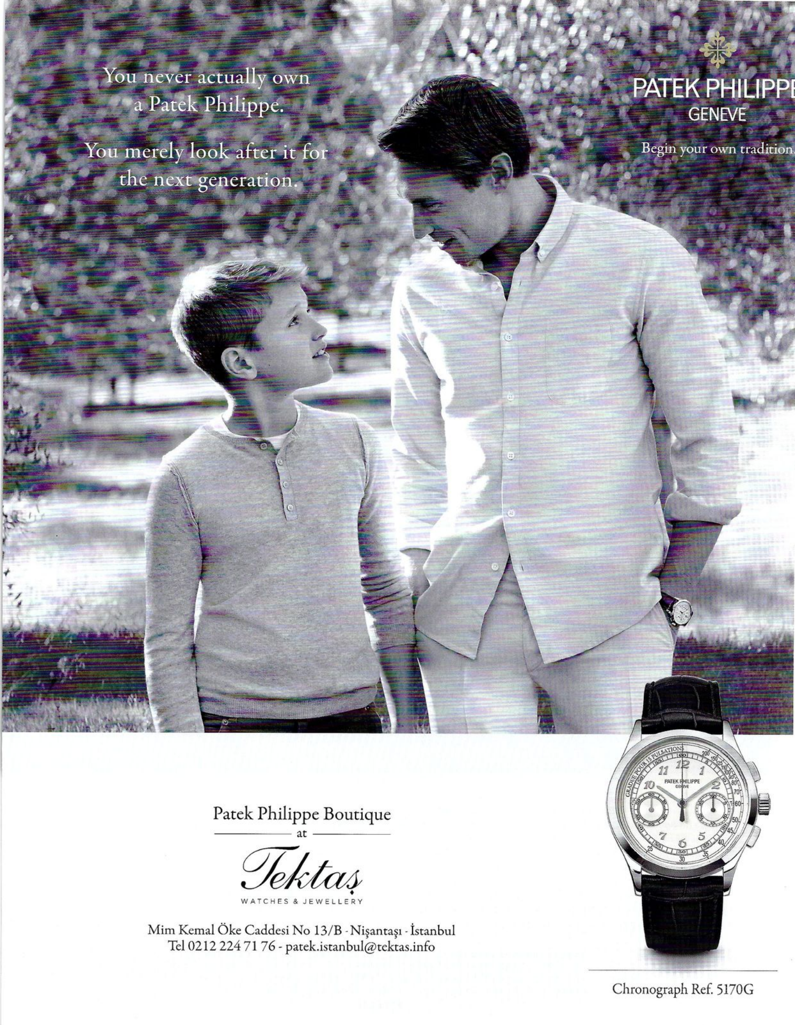
Flipping through the cards, whose sales help to subsidise this dying breed, I learned of Ali Usta, who grills meatballs near the flyover in Mecidiyeköy, Mustafa Usta, who boils sheep's heads in Beyoğlu, and Osman Usta, serving stuffed mussels in the heart of the historic city. I admit to curiosity about Topikçi Musa Usta, possibly the world's only itinerant seller of *topik* – a sort of chickpea pâté wrapped around a sweetish onion-and-tahini filling. Apparently he inherited his corner in the old Armenian neighbourhood of Pengaltı from two Armenian *topik*-makers who trained him in the art of skinning each chickpea by hand, one by one. I was not inspired to search him out, though. You can get perfectly good *topik* at several meyhanes, along with a glass of rakı to wash it down.

However, I would be devastated to see the disappearance of the humble *simit*, a crunchy bread ring coated with sesame seeds. Start with one bite and you can't help but munch full circle. And I do miss Simitçi Hüseyin, who would wheel his barrow past our front door, using a whistle to announce his arrival, since he was toothless and had trouble enunciating the words to hawk his wares.

Though far older than myself, he always addressed me as *baba* ("pops") and had the air of a child trying to please a parent. Pay for one *simit* and he'd give you two; three and he'd give you five. The next time, if you insisted on overpaying, he would thank you as if you'd bought him a Mercedes Benz. One day we gave him a whistle to replace the one municipal officials had confiscated, but they confiscated that one as well. From our house he'd wheel his barrow up a steep hill and I was amazed one day to spot this frail, elderly man and his cart in a neighbourhood miles away. Like Sisyphus, he'd push his load up the mountain and the next day he would do it all again.

But then he stopped. I was often not home when he made his rounds, and it took me a while to register that he had gone. Then one Sunday he suddenly turned up at my door, without his cart, and confessed in a horrified and uncomprehending tone of voice how ill he'd recently been. I gave him money for medicine and to pay his electricity bill, and was haunted by the thought it had not been enough. Soon, he was pushing his barrow again, cheerful as ever but looking thin and gnarled. A visiting friend diagnosed cancer. He continued his journey up and down the hill, until finally he vanished.

It was not a conscious decision, but it was a while before I had another *simit*. It took only one bite to remember how truly wonderful they are. ◆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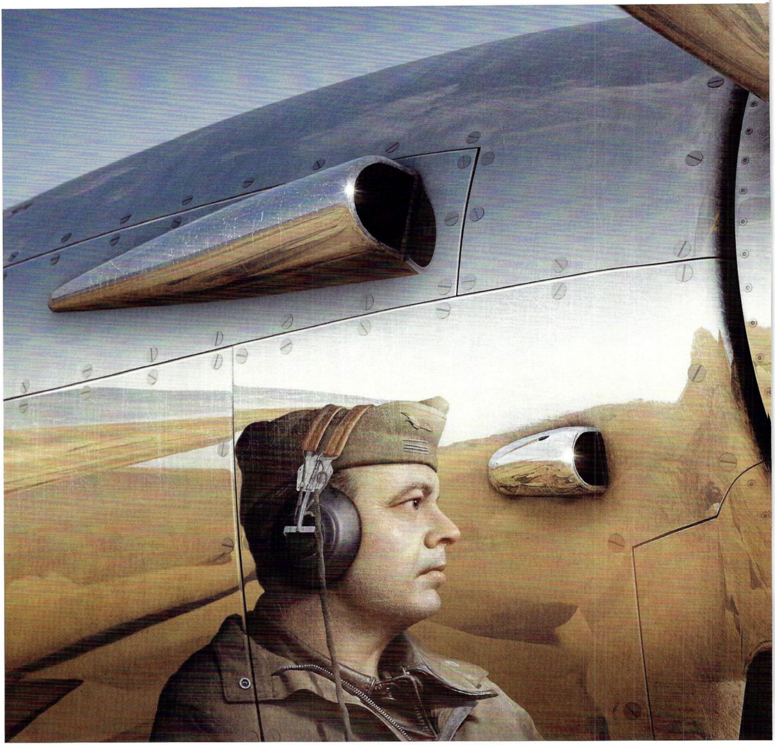

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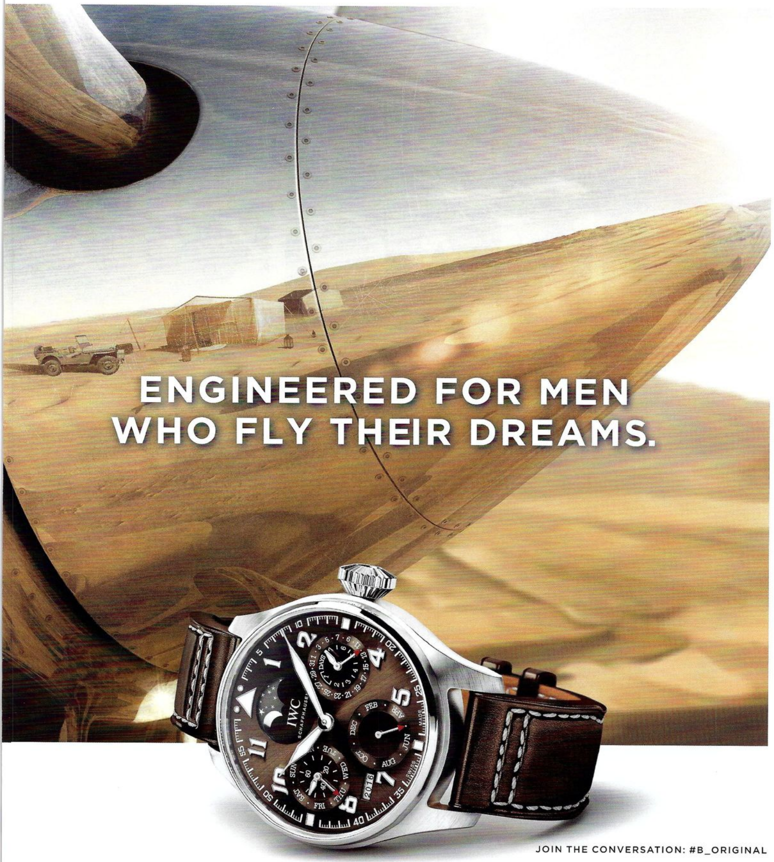
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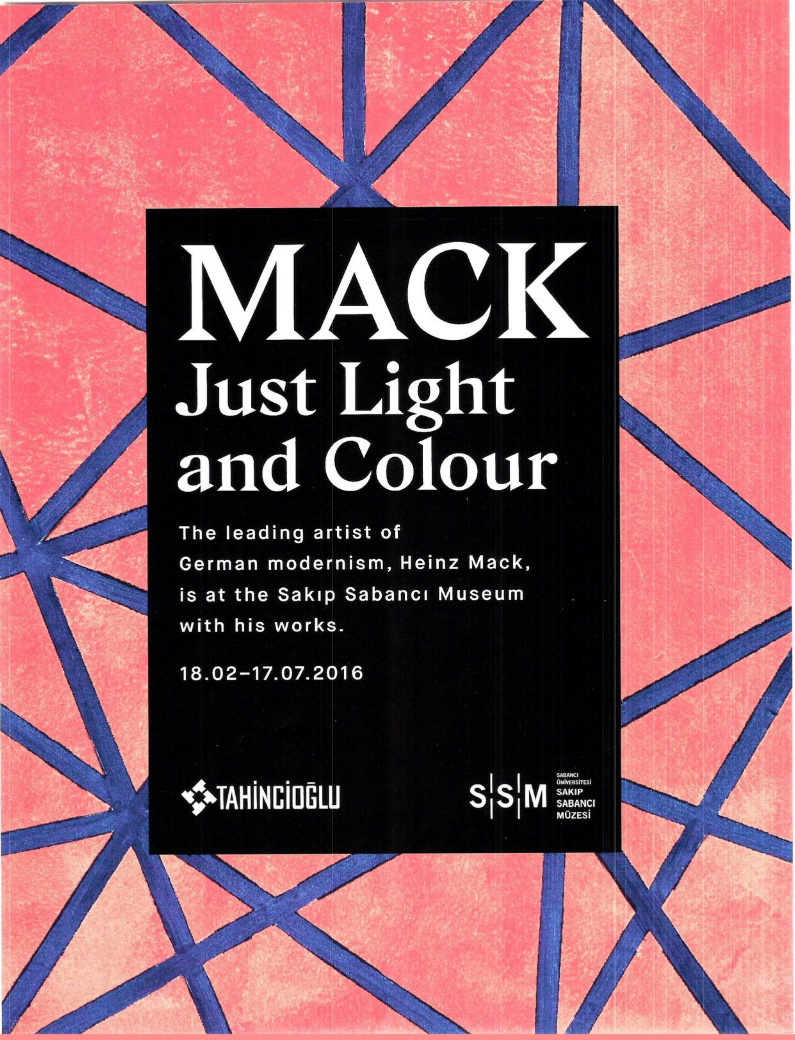

MACK
Just Light and Colour

The leading artist of German modernism, Heinz Mack, is at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum with his works.

18.02–17.07.2016

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BOOKS

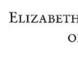
CONQUEST AND CHAOS: EURASIA'S ROLE IN HISTORY. WOOING THE OTTOMANS: ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND'S DESIGNS ON THE ISLAMIC WORLD. THE POWER OF LOVE: NEW TRANSLATIONS OF TWO ICONIC TURKISH NOVELS. SHADES OF BLUE: TILES OF IZNIK AND DAMASCUS. FROM RED ARMY CONSCRIPT TO CIA FIXER: THE ENIGMATIC RUSİ NAZAR

VIKINGS, MONGOLS AND MORE

Norman Stone

THE SILK ROADS
A New History of the World

Peter Frankopan
Bloomsbury, £30



No Alexander, no Mohammed, said the German Orientalist Carl Becker. The world of Islam had an extraordinary unity quite early on, and by the ninth century this stretched from Cordoba to Samarkand. Merchants could go safely from han to han, familiar with the language, the architecture and the rituals.

Even now, remarked the philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner in 1981, when you look at the politics of any Muslim country you feel that you are dealing with the same pack of cards – suits varying in length and high cards, but the same pack of cards just the same, though Turkey obviously has more trumps than the others.

The Seljuk Turks' empire, based on Baghdad, guaranteed the peace until the Mongol tidal wave struck in the middle of the 13th century. That unity went back to the Arab Conquest centuries before, but it in turn reflected a much older one, that established by Alexander the Great. Hellenistic civilisation had reached far into northern India, and in the 19th century enterprising Hungarians, in search of their own Central Asian origins, unearthed (or unsanded) beneath the Taklamakan Desert the remains of an extraordinary civilisation, part Chinese, part Hellenistic (and with an Indian element), the monuments of which had vanished when Tamerlane smashed the delicate irrigation system and turned everything into desert.

Peter Frankopan's book comes with the subtitle "A New History of the World", but that is not right: he writes only about places that interest him. Here he hits the right course, because histories of the world just become dustily encyclopedic (the exception is HG Wells, who managed it in Penguin's 344 pages). The focus is on Central Asia, the silk roads between China and the West, presented as the region where decisive events occurred.

Frankopan brings considerable scholarly artillery to bear; his earlier book, on the First Crusade, managed to be original because he presented it from a Byzantine perspective and could handle Byzantine and Arabic sources, and Latin and Western ones, as well as Russian. This last matters because the Russians have a formidable record in Byzantine and Central Asian studies (one of the most absurd things about Edward Said's preposterously over-quoted *Orientalism* was the way he ignored the Russians, as well as the Germans).

On this basis Frankopan has written what amounts to a history of Eurasia's contribution to world history. This takes in everything from Alexander the Great to the present-day turmoil in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which occupies the last quarter of the book. I am not sure if this was a good idea. Yes, a dreadful mess, memorably recorded in many places (Thomas Ricks's *Fiasco* on one level, Rory Stewart's *Prince of the Marshes* on another, more thoughtful one). But there are underlying questions that Peter Frankopan is well qualified to address: why did the Americans do so well in Japan and Korea, or for that matter in Turkey, while their performance in the Islamic world was so woeful? A good part of the answer must lie in the recalcitrance of that world to accept liberalism of any sort, let alone democracy, and Frankopan pulls his punches when he has to deal with it.

Of course Islam had immense strengths, and you were maybe better off as a slave in that system than as a serf in much of the Christian world. But its great and enduring weakness is its inability to adapt to modern times: as Dr Mahathir of Malaysia said, "We create nothing, we produce nothing, and we cannot even manage our own wealth." Peter Frankopan might have gone into this more than he does. He manages even to find words of recognition, as the Germans say, for the architecture of Central Asian autocrats, Dubai out of Disneyland.

But when he writes on the history of the West's relations with that world he is on home territory and is very good indeed. Of course he knows the Crusades best, and gives the best short account of the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, when the Venetians and their Norman troops sacked Constantinople instead of reconquering Jerusalem, and the Greeks responded, preferring in the end "the Sultan's turban to the Cardinal's hat", as their later *logothete* (chancellor) famously said. Cyprus fell to the Turks in 1571 in part because the Orthodox hated the Venetian Catholics, who imposed feudalism, more than the then far more tolerant Muslim Turks. This also happened in Protestant Europe, where, in the siege of Leyden a little later, slogans ran, "Better the Turk than the Pope".

The most rewarding part of the book for this writer concerns the Crusaders' predecessors, the Vikings. German-centred historians lectured the Russians to the effect that they were hopelessly backward, needing doses of north European clinical efficiency: the very name "Russia" seems to be Finnish in origin, and the Finnish word for Sweden is "*Ruotsi*". Viking rule in Kiev was only superficial, and the sources are anyway as thin and unreliable as those on which we depend for interpretation of the history of the early Ottomans (were they Byzantines with attitude or Holy Warriors?). But the Vikings were slave traders, and captured thousands of people from all over Europe to sell to the Muslim world. Frankopan refers to the Persian word for eunuch, *siklabi*, which he says derives from "Slav". He could have added that the Turco-Persian word for whore is *orospu*, the "*ros*" having obvious reference: young girls from Rus were brought down the Volga by Vikings to the Caspian.

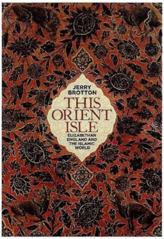
Frankopan is also rather good and succinct on the Mongols – not just builders of skull pyramids, but state-builders who, in some accounts, stopped Russia from becoming a sort of Poland. There is no end to the hares that this splendid book sets running.

ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

Jason Goodwin

THIS ORIENT ISLE
Elizabethan England and the Islamic World

Jerry Brotton
Allen Lane, £20



CORNUCOPIA readers will know of Thomas Dallam, the organ-maker sent to Constantinople by Queen Elizabeth I in 1599 to assemble an organ for Sultan Mehmed III. Dallam's diary was recently translated into modern English by John Mole.

Jerry Brotton's new book sets out to illuminate the relatively little-known origins and consequences of that and other relationships forged between Elizabethan England and the Muslim world, describing in a scholarly but lively manner the opening of English minds to the mysterious East over a period of 40 odd years, between the visit of Anthony Jenkinson to Persia and the accession of James I.

It was an era when England first drew on a network of hundreds, if not thousands, of spies, diplomats, traders, adventurers and privateers across the Mediterranean, from Marrakech to Istanbul, and beyond to Qazvin in Persia. When the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 he made her a legitimate target for assassination, and the Catholic powers of Europe placed Protestant England on an Axis of Evil with their Muslim neighbours.

The rogue state was full of energy and resource and determined to find friends and allies elsewhere. Morocco and the Ottoman Empire stood ready to make trouble for a belligerent Spain. In 1578 Sir Francis Walsingham composed a "Memorandum on the Turkey Trade", detailing the advantages and the obstacles. English ships were already in the ironic position of carrying scrap bell metal stripped from English religious houses and churches to Morocco and Istanbul, where they were used to found cannon that could be turned on Catholic enemies.

The man tasked with making friends with the Ottomans, on the principle that my enemies' enemy is my friend, was William Harborne, who arrived in Istanbul in 1578. "Charismatic, tenacious and resourceful", as Brotton says, Harborne's negotiations with Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha secured not only trading privileges for English merchants but even the first of many letters from Murad III to Queen Elizabeth. "Write the letter," Sokollu Mehmed reportedly snapped at his chancellor, "because they are Lutherans, and good people!" The letter was "transported in a satin bag tied with a silver capsule – the method used to write to Caucasian princes", Brotton notes drily, indicating its lack of importance to the Ottomans. But Harborne still walked around Istanbul with two janissaries in attendance.

Two years later, despite Sokollu's assassination and the turmoil of revolving grand viziers, Harborne secured a "triumphant conclusion to nearly three years of tireless trade, diplomacy and bribery". To French and Habsburg fury, the famous Capitulations gave English merchants full commercial rights in Ottoman lands, with privileges that remained in force for another 343 years, until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. He would later return to Istanbul as an accredited ambassador, appointing a network of consuls across the Empire to smooth trade – which brought returns to the English of nearly 300 per cent on five annual voyages to Ottoman ports, worth £70,000 each – and to deliver intelligence to Elizabeth's cabinet.

He also struggled to persuade the Ottomans to act to divert the great Spanish Armada aimed at England in the summer of 1588. "I performed my utmost endeavour by setting one enemy of God his church against the other to impair the same." Here he had rather less success: it was the royal court in Marrakech, not Istanbul, that let off fireworks to celebrate the Armada's defeat. But by his retirement in 1588, to peaceful Norfolk obscurity, Harborne had secured Anglo-Ottoman commerce, established England's first embassy in the Muslim world, created a consular trading network across the Mediterranean and, perhaps not least, rescued scores of English captives from the galleys.

Those galley slaves are a reminder that not all Eastern adventures were high-tone diplomatic affairs, though Brotton has plenty of those, some of them more colourful and surprising than Harborne's doughty service in Istanbul.

Elizabethan England was essentially parochial, sedentary and agricultural, but it sent forth Anthony Jenkinson, a bold young merchant who introduced himself in short order to Ivan the Terrible, Süleyman the Magnificent and Shah Tahmasp of Persia; and Anthony Sherley, a profligate rascal who used a reception at the Shah's court to intrigue and booze himself into oblivion around the courts of Europe. As for renegades, we meet Hassan Ağa, eunuch and adviser to the Algerian court, formerly a Great Yarmouth merchant called Samson Rowlie; and Dallam's guide, his "Turk", who turned out to be "an Englishman, borne in Chorley in Lancashire; his name Finch".

Between these electrifying narratives of traders and diplomats forging their own enthusiastic, uneasy or dishonest relations with the Muslim world, Brotton has the English stage serving as his chorus. He observes that Turks, Moors and Persians trod the boards in 60 English plays between 1576 and 1603, developing gradually from the crude paynim (non-Christian) of medieval miracle plays towards more complex characters with the ability to attract as well as repel their Christian audiences: Shakespeare's conflicted Moor, he argues, trumps them all. Here the detail sometimes threatens to overwhelm the reader, but Brotton is right to see the plays as a sounding board for ideas and attitudes emerging in Elizabethan England.

After Elizabeth's death England's religious crisis passed, and attention shifted to the opportunities and challenges offered by the New World: to *The Tempest*, rather than *Othello*.

In a delicate coda to the narrative, Brotton offers a glimpse of his own Yorkshire childhood in the 1970s, playing and learning in a school with Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. "Not a multicultural idyll… neither was it defined by theological absolutes." Sir Francis Walsingham would have understood him perfectly.

THE POLITICS OF LOVE

Laurent Mignon

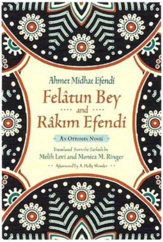
FELÂTUN BEY AND RÂKIM EFENDİ

Ahmet Midhat Efendi
Translated by Melih Levi
and Monica M Ringer
Syracuse University Press, £14.50

MADONNA IN A FUR COAT

Sabahattin Ali
Translated by Maureen Freely
and Alexander Dawe
Penguin Classics, £9.99

Too often critics and scholars have reduced the Turkish novel to an essentialised exploration of the conflict between East and


Ahmet Midhat Efendi
Felâtun Bey
and
Râkım Efendi
An Ottoman Novel
Translated from the Turkish by Melih Levi and Monica M. Ringer
Afterword by A. Holly Shissler

West and the quest for a synthesis. Their interpretation was partly based on the limited number of Tanzimat novels that had been transcribed into the new Turkish alphabet after the Harf İnkılabı, the "revolution of the letters" of 1928. Among them, Ahmet Midhat Efendi's *Felâtun Bey and Râkım Efendi*, published in 1875, gained an iconic status.

By contrasting Râkım Efendi, a studious self-made man, with Felâtun Bey, the archetypal spendthrift, ultra-Westernised dandy, this novel, now translated into English by Melih Levi and Monica M Ringer, captured the imagination. A matter for literary debate is whether Ahmet Midhat borrowed, without acknowledgement, the central narrative device of the novel – the opposition between a character incarnating a successful synthesis between East and West and an *alafranga* ignoramus – from Hovsep Vartanyan's novel *Story of Akabi* (*Akabi Hikayesi*), published in 1851 in Armeno-Turkish (Turkish written in the Armenian alphabet).

However, Vartanyan's tragic love story is a much more complex narrative, which, besides Westernisation, also investigates religious sectarianism among Armenians and the condition of women. Though not without humour, the Armeno-Turkish text does not leave much room for hope. Ahmet Midhat, on the other hand, believes in a brighter future, and the differences between the heroes of the two novels are too many to list.

Most importantly, perhaps, Râkım, unlike his Armeno-Turkish alter ego Hagop, has sex. Hagop, after all, is a Catholic, and Râkım "not an angel". Yet when Râkım and his mistress, teacher and confidante, Josephine, share moments of intimacy, the narrator politely draws the curtains and informs his readers that "in storytelling, some details should be left out. These details can be figured out through intuition."

However, little is left to imagination when it comes to the love life of Felâtun Bey. The occurrence known in Turkish literary history as the "*mayonez meselesi*" – translated here as the "mayonnaise incident" – involving some hanky-panky with a corpulent French cook in the kitchen of English expatriates, and resulting in Felâtun's "trousers smeared with something that looked like a creamy drink", is a case in point.

The difference between Felâtun's antics and Râkım's teaching Persian and Ottoman poetry to the entranced daughters of their English friends could not be greater. Râkım incarnates an idealised fusion of Ottoman Turkish and European culture, the much-chanted synthesis of East and West.

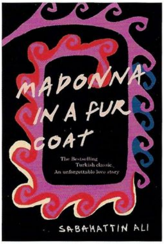
While Ahmet Midhat's didacticism could have turned this narrative into a rather dull text, his talent as a storyteller continues to delight readers. In more ways than one his vivid depictions of life in Pera and Tophane prefigure Sait Faik's portraits of a vanishing cosmopolitan Istanbul. Indicative of the success of this formula were the transcription and publication of the novel in Armeno-Turkish in 1879.

Ahmet Midhat, the most prolific author of the era, explored a great number of challenging ideas, from the radical rejection of patriarchy in the novella *The Philosophy of Women* to cross-dressing and homosexuality in *Madam Dürdane*. Nonetheless, early republican scholars scolded him for his populism and arguably poor style. Conscious of the high levels of illiteracy among the Turkish-speaking Muslims of the Empire, Ahmet Midhat wrote in a conversational style, directly addressing the reader and incorporating large amounts of dialogue. His novels could thus be read aloud and reach a wider audience.

This concern for the well-being of ordinary people was one of the few things that Ahmet Midhat shared with Sabahattin Ali, the author of *Madonna in a Fur Coat* (*Kürk Mantolu Madonna*), now available in an English translation by Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe in the prestigious Penguin Classics series.

Though critical of laissez-faire economics and a protectionist, Ahmet Midhat Efendi had not been unfavourable to Adam Smith's economic theories, while Sabahattin Ali would embrace socialism at a young age and serve several prison sentences because of his political beliefs. The conditions of his murder in 1948, while trying to escape to Bulgaria, remain unclear, though the involvement of the Turkish state has been proven.

Sabahattin Ali's political engagement on the left, his humanism and internationalism, had their roots in a universalist and quasi-mystical vision of Anatolian folk culture shared by Raif Bey, the main character of the partly autobiographical *Madonna in a Fur Coat*: "Reading our history, we learn of all the civilisations that rose and fell in those lands. Lying under olive trees that go back ten or fifteen centuries, I think about the people who collected their fruits through the ages."



The novel relates the encounter in the Berlin of the 1920s between Raif Bey, a young Turk with an artistic disposition, and an artist, Maria Puder. His fascination with her self-portrait – *The Madonna in a Fur Coat* – is the beginning of one of the most beautiful and complex stories of love and longing in the Turkish tongue. It is through the diary of Raif Bey that bohemian Berlin comes to life, and it is in sharp contrast to the rather disheartening picture of Ankara in the Thirties drawn in the frame story.

Remarkably, the novel also paints the portrait of one of the earliest Jewish characters of Turkish fiction. Maria has a Jewish father who converted to Catholicism before her birth. Adamantly, she claims that she has "nothing to do with religion". And yet she anxiously asks Raif: "Are you an enemy of the Jews?" He responds that he does not harbour "that kind of animosity" – words that were not only significant on the eve of Germany's takeover by the Nazis but also in Turkey, where Sabahattin Ali had been in open conflict with Nihal Atsız, a former friend and now advocate of National Socialist ideology.

The novel was published in book form in 1943, one year after the implementation of the *Varlık Vergisi*, a discriminatory wealth tax which had dramatic consequences for the Jewish community and other non-Muslims. Sabahattin Ali knew only too well that love was political and that world politics could not be reduced to a conflict between East and West.

Laurent Mignon is associate professor of Turkish at the University of Oxford. His most recent book is 'Hüzünlü Özgürlük: Yahudi Edebiyatı ve Düşüncesi Üzerine Yazılar' (A Sad State of Freedom: Writings on Jewish Literature and Thought), Gözlem, 2014

CERAMIC DYNAMICS

Tim Stanley

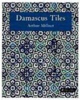
IZNIK
Ömer Koç Collection

Hülya Bilgi
Ömer Koç Foundation, £375

DAMASCUS TILES
Mamluk and Ottoman Architectural Ceramics from Syria, Munich, London and New York

Arthur Millner
Prestel, £60

IZNIK
ÖMER KOÇ
COLLECTION



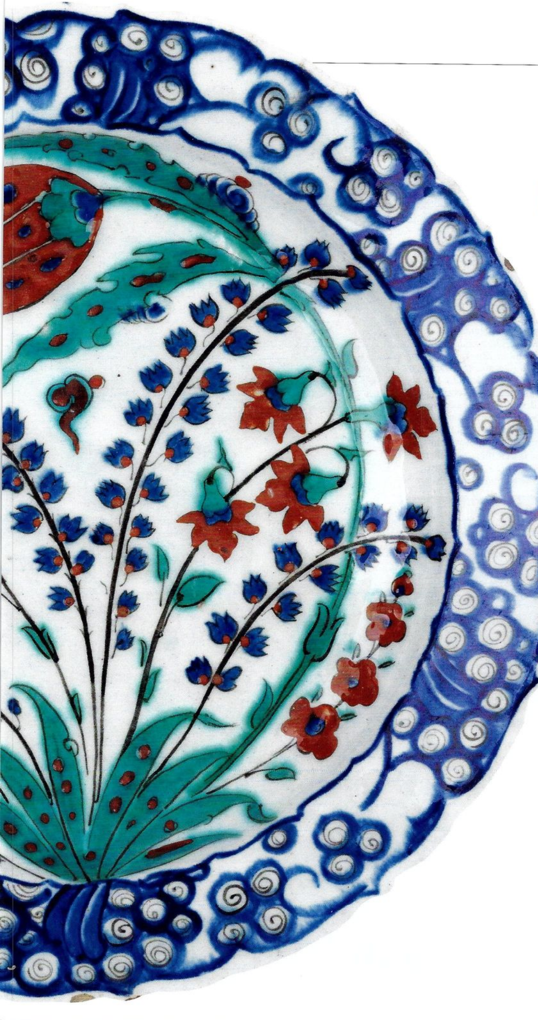
Iznik production was undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements in the history of ceramics. The quality and ambition of the potting, the great range of attractive designs and the brilliance of the colours should all be celebrated, and once every few years a book appears that fulfils that aim. Ömer Koç's collection is so large and varied, and the new catalogue of his collection produced to such high standards, that its publication matches the eminence of the subject.

Ömer Koç began to form his holdings in this field less than 20 years ago, but by 2009 he had already acquired 200 pieces, which were shown in an exhibition at the Sadberk Hanım Museum in Büyükdere on the Bosphorus, along with items drawn from the museum's own collection. The catalogue of this show, *Dance of Fire: Iznik Tiles and Ceramics*, also by Hülya Bilgi, was a hefty volume, but it pales by comparison with the new book. The collection is now more than a third larger, and the new catalogue is even bigger, more richly illustrated and better designed – and, of course, heavier, at some six kilos. Book reviewing has become a form of weight training.

The collection contains some vessels and tiles from the early-to-mid-16th century, but its strengths are in the material from the late 16th and 17th centuries. As a result, most pieces display the bright red that is one of the finest achievements of the Iznik potters. In terms of vessels, production in this period consisted of series with related shapes and patterns, rather than individual masterpieces, and the collection is presented in groups with similar decoration. They are all of relatively modest proportions: among almost 200 dishes of various sizes and profiles, only very rarely do they exceed 35 centimetres in diameter.

Compositions with flowers and the occasional tree predominate, but there are also dishes with metal vessels included in their designs, others with garden pavilions, a larger series of vessels decorated with ships, dishes with human figures, and a bottle and four dishes with coloured grounds scattered with animals, which are followed by late items with coloured animals on white grounds. In many wares, this would give rise to a dull book, but not here – the variations achieved by the painters are so great that the sequences are entertaining for the eye. The same is true of the decorative schemes to which Ömer Koç's tiles once belonged.

The scholarship on display is sound in most respects, but it has barely moved on since the publication of Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby's *Iznik: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey* in 1989. The rise and fall of Iznik ware are presented, too, as a self-contained story, as though international factors played a very small role. There are, it is true, no fewer than six dishes decorated with a bunch of grapes, copied at first or second hand from Chinese porcelain dishes of the 15th century, and an appendix illustrates more than 30 European copies of Iznik tiles



Above This bowl in two shades of cobalt, 1510–20, is a striking, rare early-Iznik piece in the Ömer Koç Collection
Left A dish from the 1560s, when Iznik's famed coral red was at its most vivid

Ömer Koç Collection

and vessels made in the 19th and 20th centuries. But the ebb and flow of production elsewhere had a major effect on the history of Iznik, and this is underplayed.

At the end of the essay on tiles, for example, we are told that tile production ceased because "tile decoration went out of favour" towards the middle of the 18th century. Why, then, does the Hünkâr Sofası (the imperial reception hall) in Topkapı Palace, which reached its current form under Selim III (1789–1808), have large panels of Dutch tiles?

The story of Iznik is very dynamic, but its dynamism is not truly comprehensible when the links to other ceramic stories in the Middle East, China and Europe are omitted. Indeed, the unique character of Iznik arose when Ottoman artists and craftsmen reformed a tradition of blue-and-white wares based on Asian models by drawing on quite different European ideas of design and colour.

Underplaying international connections is not, though, a fault peculiar to this book, or to the study of Iznik ceramics. It happens whenever decorative arts traditions are extolled within a national framework. Try getting a specialist in French ceramics to admit that Iznik or Iranian fritware provided the conceptual model for soft-paste porcelain!

The unique character of Iznik is amply demonstrated by this magnificent catalogue, in which all the pieces are photographed individually, but which also includes pictures of the way the huge collection is displayed in Ömer Koç's home. The massing of the dishes and tiles on the walls shows a pride and delight that are entirely justified.

The greatest regional response to Iznik production came from Syria, where tilework traditions on the Ottoman model emerged in both Aleppo and Damascus; the latter also produced large numbers of Iznik-style vessels. The tile production of Damascus, and to a lesser extent of other centres, is the subject of Arthur Millner's new book, which consists of five discursive essays, including three on "The Mamluk Period", "The Ottoman Period" and "A Western Craze for Tiles", followed by a catalogue described as "An Anthology of Damascus Tiles". This last section contains 148 examples of dispersed tilework in private collections and museums.

The great strength of this book is the images, which allow us to see buildings that are now unattainable because of the civil war, and which in at least one case – the Khusrawiyyah in Aleppo – have been completely destroyed. With the "Anthology", it also brings together the dispersed material in a very useful way. A subject that has been at the margins is brought centre stage. Nevertheless, our gratitude for the great effort and cost involved is undermined by the uneven nature of the text.

To give one example, we are told on page 124 that the tiles on the Tekkiye Süleymaniye in Damascus, built in the 1550s, are very close in design to those of the mosque of Selim I in Istanbul, built after his death in 1520. According to Millner, a link is provided because both buildings were designed by Sinan. No, they weren't! This is a scissors-and-paste approach using very poor glue.

It is clear, too, that Millner learned from the website of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London that certain types of tile in the museum's collection are from the Çinili Hamam in Zeyrek, Istanbul, built in the 1540s, and he rightly makes a link with tiles made in Damascus in the following decades. But he does not credit the website, as he should, and he made no enquiry as to where the information came from. This would have yielded two important points.

One is that there are other tiles in his book that are also from the Çinili Hamam (as are

ÖMER KOÇ COLLECTION

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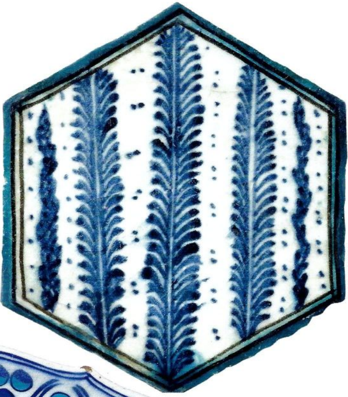
A FLOURISH OF IZNIK
TOP A HEXAGONAL TILE WITH A BLOSSOMING FRUIT TREE, C1540–45
ABOVE A TILE PANEL WITH A PRAYER FOR PROTECTION, IN CELİ SÜLÜS SCRIPT, 2ND HALF OF 16TH CENTURY
RIGHT FINELY DRAWN TURQUOISE AND COBALT TRIPLE-DOT (ÇINTAMANI) AND TIGER-STRIPE MOTIFS COVER THIS DISH, 1535–40



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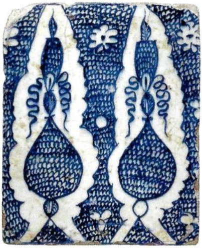
several in Hülya Bilgi's catalogue). The second is that the link between these tiles and the Çinili Hamam is the result of the toil of Charlotte Maury at the Louvre and the team of archaeologists and architects now working on the excavation and restoration of the hamam – hard labour that he does not credit. This is not plagiarism, as the information is publicly available, but it shows a lack of scholarly rigour and generosity.

Despite these stern caveats, the book contains a lot of information that it is useful to have in one place, and it is already playing a role in focusing attention on Syrian tilework. Indeed, I have already cited the publication in an article on Ottoman tiles because of the new links Millner has established.

He ends with a very surprising image, of a tile (V&A: 530-1900) that shows a pretty serving woman holding a bottle and a wine cup (not a youth drinking, as the caption states). The museum website previously attributed this item to Iran in the 17th century, but Millner rightly re-attributes it to Damascus. He does not explain, though, why only one tile with a human figure should have been produced there during a whole century: there are no parallels. The answer is surely that the tile is not 17th-century, but was made in the later 19th century in response to the huge demand for anything that looked vaguely Safavid. It is a fake.

Tim Stanley is senior curator for the Middle Eastern collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, t.stanley@vam.ac.uk



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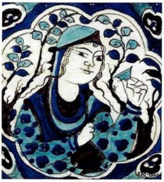
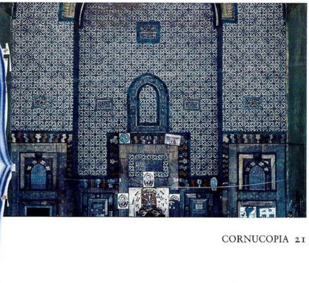
Distinctive Damascus tiles
Left Mamluk 'fern' tile, 1420–30
Above Mosque lamps or vases on an early-15th-century tile
Below A serving woman of debatable origin. Is this a rare example of a human figure on a 17th-century Damascus tile?
Bottom The 16th-century tiled eyvan of the Bayt Jumblatt in Aleppo. An emir of the Jumblatt family spent 1,000 Ottoman gold coins on this celebrated courtyard palace



VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM



PENNY OAKLEY

A MAN OF MANY MASKS

David Barchard

A Dark Path to Freedom
Rusi Nazar: from the Red Army to the CIA
Enver Altaylı
Trans. David Barchard
Christopher Hurst, £25

On the last day of 2014, as winter gales lashed Turkey's southern coast, I met Rusi Nazar in a house just outside Side. It isn't every day that one meets a man at the end of a legendary life which spanned Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, the CIA in the Cold War, Iran after the Revolution, and Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. Having translated *A Dark Path to Freedom*, Nazar's forthcoming official biography, I felt I knew him and his adventurous and extraordinary life already. But I had come almost too late: the man I saw was nearly a century old, and obviously close to his end.

A tall man, Nazar lay deeply asleep beside his nurse, looking more fragile than anyone I had ever seen. For someone who had lived so dangerously for decades, at least he now enjoyed a good life in extreme old age. Uzbek and Turkish nurses watched over Nazar night and day in a luxury apartment specially fitted out for his needs and comfort. All this was made possible by Enver Altaylı, a Turkish friend of many years, who managed the villa and the nursing and had recorded Nazar's memories on tape, writing the biography. On days when the weather was good, Nazar still walked outside amid the Mediterranean flowers in the garden.

Then he awoke and was all smiles, speaking mainly Uzbek and reaching out to embrace me. Although he had in his heyday been a senior American government official in Washington, it was no longer clear if he remembered English. We certainly did not speak it during my visit.

The villa in Side was the twilight moment of a life that began far away in the Central Asian city of Margilan during the year of the Soviet revolution of 1917 but crossed the world as the tide of history took him to the Red Army in the Second World War, then to Nazi Germany, and finally to America.

As described in Altaylı's long and meticulous biography, based on months of interviews with Nazar, the young Soviet student and Red Army soldier was transformed for nearly three and a half decades into a US diplomat and CIA career officer. Eleven years were spent as a somewhat controversial diplomat in Turkey, a country he regarded as his second homeland and where he worked hard to combat the influence of the pro-Soviet left. What follows is taken from the picture drawn by Altaylı in his biography.

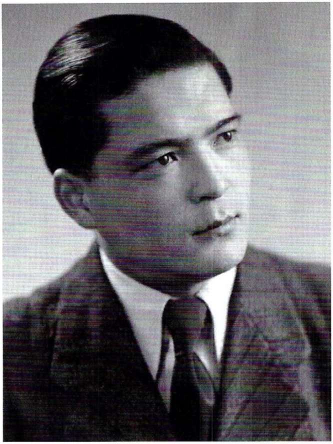
Despite the wildly varying regimes under which he lived and the personas he adopted, Nazar nourished a single consistent goal throughout his adult life. It was to bring about the collapse of Soviet communism and win back independence for the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.

There was a bitter personal beginning to this quest. In his earliest years, though they were under Soviet rule, the Nazar family still lived the traditional pious life of silk producers in the Uzbek city of Margilan, which had changed little for centuries.

Then, when Nazar was only ten, his elder brother was executed for nationalist activities by the Soviets. Nazar's father, a God-fearing conservative, responded by thrusting a cigarette and a glass of vodka into his young son's hands, telling him that to fight against the Russians and defeat them he would have to adopt their ways and learn their science. The rest of Nazar's life was a struggle for independence for Turkestan, a fight that during the height of Soviet power appeared completely hopeless, supported by only a tiny group of exiled and little-known intellectuals living thousands of miles away in Western Europe.

So Nazar grew up acquiring a modern science education, a love of Western classical music, and the political savvy needed to stay out of trouble in the Soviet Union of the late 1930s, when Stalin's show trials extended even into Turkestani towns, wiping out leading local members of the Communist Party. When Nazar was suspended from the party he travelled to Moscow and managed to talk his way into being reinstated.

Then the Second World War arrived and Nazar was uprooted for ever from his family life in Central Asia to serve in the Red Army. Along with millions of other youngsters, he was plucked from his family, given only the most minimal training, then sent to the front in a cattle truck crammed to overflowing with conscripts, on a rail journey lasting many days. He



A DARK PATH TO FREEDOM
RUSI NAZAR
FROM THE RED ARMY TO THE CIA
ENVER ALTAYLI

Above The young Rusi Nazar
Left The CIA operative
Opposite In German uniform fighting with the anti-Soviet Turkestan Legion

would never see his mother again and would only return to his home town half a century later, after the fall of communism in the 1990s.

Fighting against the advancing German armies in Ukraine, Nazar was wounded, lost contact with his Red Army unit, and was slowly nursed back to health by a Ukrainian family in what was now German-occupied territory. Knowing he would probably be shot if he returned to the Red Army, and that Soviet prisoners of war in German camps were held in appalling conditions in which many died, he took the decision to join the legions fighting Soviet Russia under Hitler.

Until this point Nazar had been just another young man from Central Asia, but inside the exiled Turkestani movement his abilities soon showed themselves. He rose quickly and became close to the exiled Turkestani leadership in Berlin, who dreamed of leading a government if Germany won the war and Soviet Russia collapsed. This often involved vehement conflicts with both the Germans and the SS, and with the anti-Soviet Russian groups, who if anything enjoyed more backing from the Germans.

During 1944 and 1945 the Red Army advanced westwards and Nazar and his friends realised that German defeat was only a matter of time. If he had been in Berlin when the Red Army arrived, that might have been the end of Nazar's story. But, fortunately for him, he was far away in Italy and southern Germany.

By the spring of 1945 the Turkestan Legion had been shattered and its survivors were scattered across northern Italy, only a few days away from the advancing armies of the Allies. The German High Command had given him – a man still in his twenties – the hopeless task of trying to gather the fragments of the Turkestan Legion back into some kind of fighting force. Nazar travelled down to Italy as Allied bombers flew overhead, attacking roads and railways, and normal conditions collapsed.

As the war ended, Nazar and a friend were sheltered by a German family, who hid them from Allied forces searching for Soviet deserters to hand over to the Red Army. At one point he hid under a bale in a hayloft to avoid being found.

Several hard years followed in post-war Germany, during which Nazar scratched a living by any means he could and worked among exiles from the Soviet Union – some of whom were murdered by the KGB.

His life changed for ever towards the end of the decade, when Archibald Bulloch Roosevelt, one of the CIA's first-generation grandees, invited Nazar to meet him in Munich and suggested that he migrate to the United States – something Nazar (who did not even speak English) had never considered. After moving to New York in the early-to-mid-1950s, Nazar became both an American and a CIA officer, though he continued to work on behalf of the Turkestan national cause at Third World conferences, confronting Russian and Chinese politicians about the plight of their subject nationalities.

For someone who was presumably in some sense a secret agent, Nazar seems to have met an astonishing succession of famous people. On a flight across the Pacific, he slept in a bunk bed touching toes with the young Elizabeth Taylor. In Europe he spent an evening talking to Nâzım Hikmet, Turkey's most famous 20th-century poet, a communist who had fled into exile in the Soviet Union and who advised him, despairingly, to stay clear of politics.

During a decade as a US Embassy diplomat in Turkey from 1959 to 1971, where he became a bugbear of the pro-Moscow left, Nazar nevertheless made friends with detained Kurdish politicians and predicted that the policy of clamping down on the Kurds would ultimately prove highly damaging for Turkey. A decade later he was working in Germany with Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Polish-American geostrategist.

During the Iran hostage crisis Nazar was the first American official sent into Tehran – disguised as a German Afghan-carpet seller. In Afghanistan he confronted and argued with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the hard-line Islamist leader of Hezbi Islami – and warned his American colleagues of the danger of trying to ally with Saudi-backed Islamic militants, even though he himself had twice performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. More successfully, he advised President Reagan on the eve of his visit to Moscow that the Soviet Union was not impregnable but tottering, and might soon fall. At this time Nazar's was almost the only voice in Washington saying this.

When future histories of the Cold War are written, Rusi Nazar surely deserves a mention. ◆

'A Dark Path to Freedom' will be published by Christopher Hurst in the autumn

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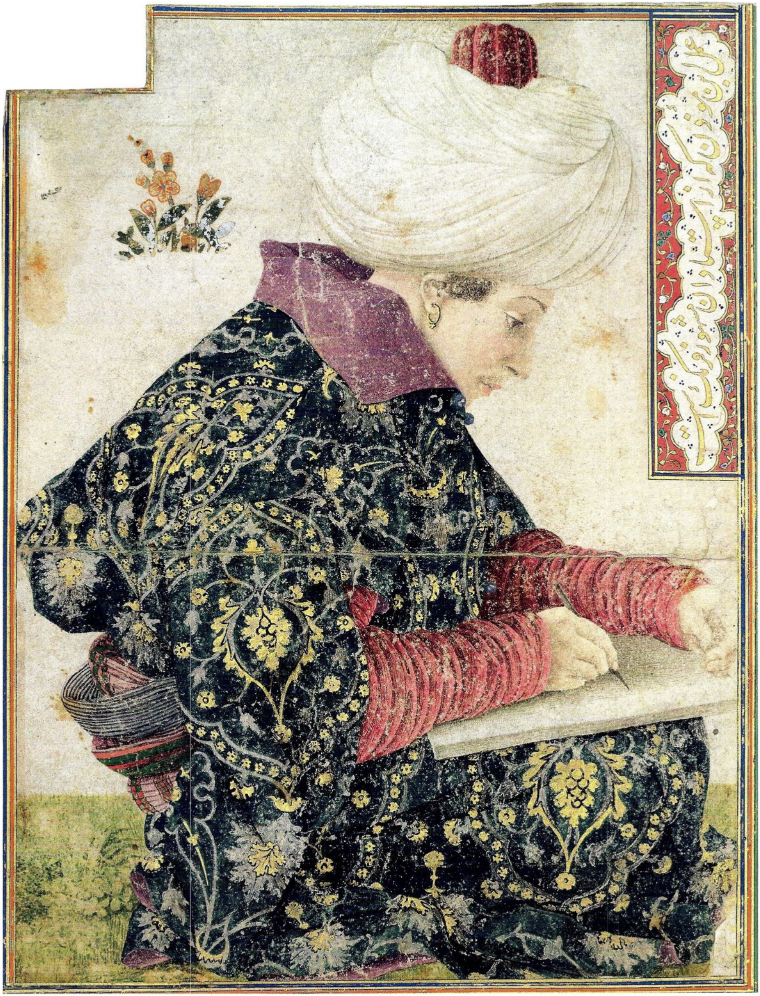


ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM, BOSTON, MA, USA/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

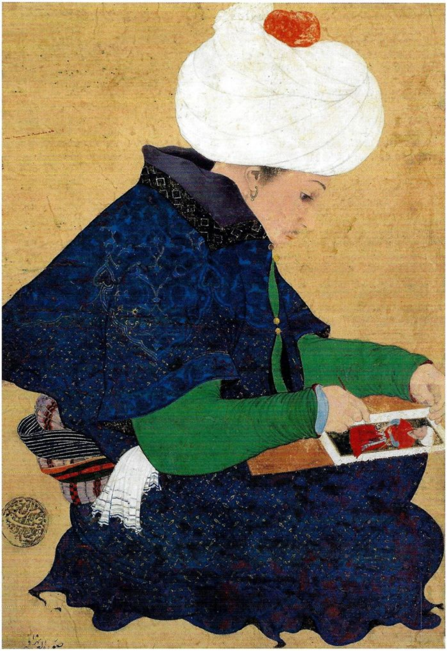
A BELLINI FOR THE SULTAN

Summoned by Mehmed the Conqueror, the painter Gentile Bellini spent two fruitful years at the Ottoman court, but most of his Turkish works have simply vanished. Adding zest to the dry academic mystery of the missing Bellinis is a cocktail of international skulduggery, fratricidal plots, massive bribes, and haggling over sacred relics. By Rosamond E Mack

Little survives of the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini's activity at the court of Mehmed the Conqueror from 1479 to 1481, apart from the two portraits of the Sultan in customary European media that were well known in Italy during the following decades – a bronze medal and a heavily repainted canvas in the National Gallery, London. However, we know from the most reliable witness at the court, Angiolello, an Italian captive who had become the Sultan's treasurer, that Mehmed had specifically requested other works, including a drawing of Venice, paintings for the Topkapı, and portraits of people at court who attracted the Sultan's attention.

The Italian word for portrait, *ritratto*, deriving from the word for "representation", also means a drawn image or study, normally the first step in portraiture, and the eight surviving *ritratti* in Gentile's style are all small-scale works on paper, the preferred medium in the Islamic world. Seven are pen-and-ink drawings, and one, now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, is a finely painted miniature (opposite).

They vary widely in quality and raise nagging questions. Why are the two drawings that are almost certainly by Gentile – *The Seated Woman* and *The Seated Janissary* (following pages, both in the British Museum) – more precise and beautifully finished than his other drawings? Why are there so many copies of lost Gentile originals? And why, since they had no impact in Venice after Gentile's return, do three of his figures suddenly surface at the Vatican about a decade later in paintings by



FREER GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC: PURCHASE – CHARLES LANG FREER

Both these paintings, c1480, were inspired by a palace scene drawn by Gentile Bellini at the court of Mehmed II
Opposite Boston's 'Seated Scribe' follows the artist's forms and modelling in the head, hands and sleeves; infrared reveals that some of the drawing under the blue is also in his style
Right 'The Seated Artist', in the Freer Gallery, Washington, ascribed to Mehmed II's court painter, Sinan Bey, may be based on a tracing of the original

the artist Pintoricchio? International events suggest intriguing possibilities.

The first questions should be considered in the context of Mehmed II's artistic programme. Current scholarship agrees that he fostered a court studio where painters from Italy or Dalmatia, such as Maestro Paolo of Ragusa, taught artists from the Islamic tradition to draw realistic figures and to model them three-dimensionally. Copies were also produced after Gentile Bellini and Costanzo da Ferrara, the Italian masters temporarily at Mehmed's court.

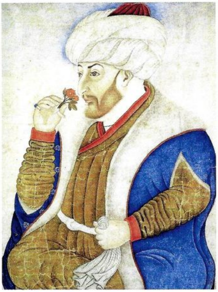
The Seated Scribe in Boston's Isabella Gardner Museum (page 24) is remarkably close to Gentile in the shape and modelling of the head, hands and sleeves, but the heavily repainted blue robe conceals and flattens the body. An infrared reflectogram published in Jürg Meyer zur Capellen's 1985 monograph on Gentile shows that, beneath the repainting, the shoulder and upper arm echo his distinctive, weakly structured upper-body type. But the tubular folds below the elbow and at the hem, which exaggerate Gentile's drapery forms, are by a different artist, probably a European.

A miniature of *The Seated Artist* in Washington's Freer Gallery (previous page) is a copy of Boston's *Seated Scribe* portrayed as an artist. Perhaps traced and partially repainted, it has been attributed to Sinan Bey, a pupil of Maestro Paolo.

Other Oriental artists blended European realism with a Persian aesthetic and iconography. The famous miniature of *Mehmed II Smelling a Rose* (above), with a head drawn after Gentile but a pose and royal attributes following Timurid and Türkmen conventions, has been attributed to Sinan Bey's pupil Şiblizade Ahmed, who was renowned for his portraits. This format became the template for official sultans' portraits from the 1570s.

The precise lines and carefully hatched modelling of Gentile's *Seated Woman* (opposite) and *Seated Janissary* (overleaf) would have made them excellent models for instruction and copying. The colour notes on the female figure, by an unidentified hand in Venetian dialect, seem to presage a painted miniature. Scientific analysis of the materials, together with new technology that reveals layers of work on paper, could determine whether all the sheets originated in Istanbul, and how many hands worked on them over time.

The fact that both the best drawings and the miniature are of figures seated in Oriental poses indicates that Mehmed may have envisaged diplomatic gifts to Persian courts. Washington's *Seated Artist* shows the artist painting a standing figure in Timurid dress, and the group as a whole relates to contemporary Timurid and Türkmen images of single figures then reaching Istanbul as diplomatic gifts or ransom. Serial copies of comparable figures in an Ottoman idiom, adjusted for specific destinations, would have made ideal gifts. The various ethnicities and costumes of the standing figures copied from Gentile drawings (following pages) indicate that he believed his patron wanted him to portray a diverse society. An anecdote from Angiolello reveals an exceptionally intimate relationship with the Sultan at a time when Mehmed kept himself isolated and imperially aloof: after scrutinising Gentile's drawing of a dervish, the Sultan pressed him to say what he really thought of the man.



TOPKAPI PALACE MUSEUM

Gentile's Istanbul drawings, 1479–81
Opposite Of the four drawings shown in this article, the 'Seated Woman', with colour notes in the Venetian dialect, and the 'Seated Janissary' (overleaf, centre), both by Gentile Bellini, are exquisitely drawn. The other two, the 'Standing Turk' (in a turban) and the 'Standing Man' (in a hat with a plume), are early and less masterly copies

Left 'Mehmed II Smelling a Rose', c 1480, a miniature in the Topkapi attributed to the renowned portraitist Şiblizade Ahmed, has a head drawn and modelled after Gentile Bellini

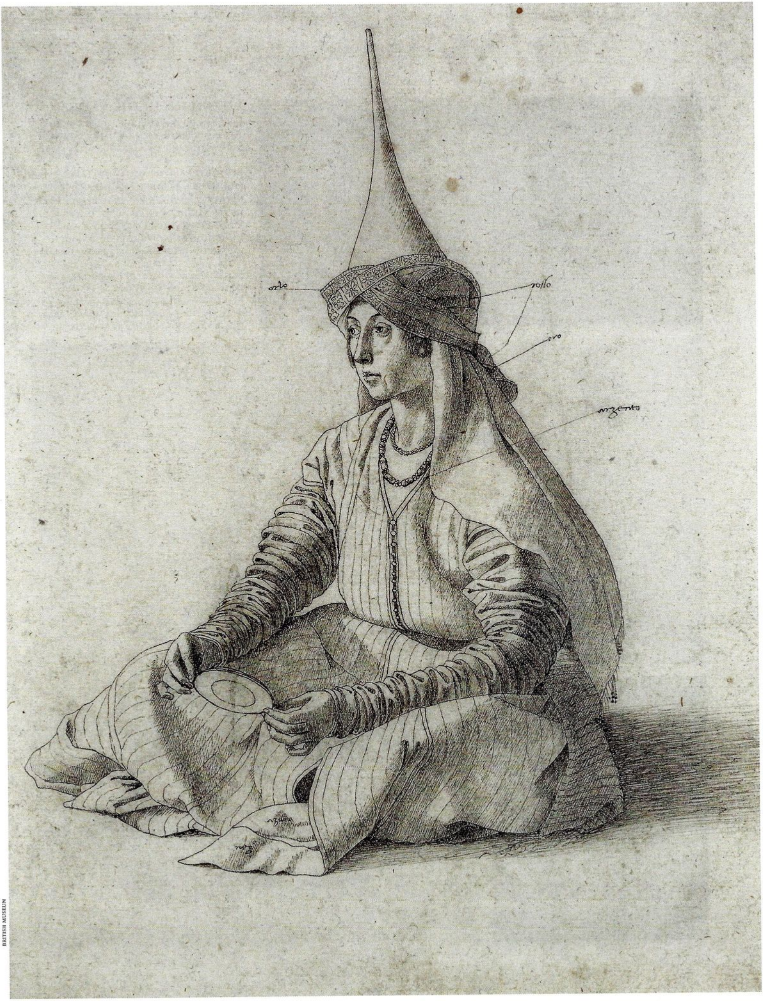
JÜRGEN FRANK

Below Beyazid brought his brother Cem's body back from Naples to be buried in Bursa, next to their brother Mustafa in the mausoleums of the early Ottoman sultans. Throughout their conflict, Beyazid and Cem corresponded in rhyming verse

Works by Gentile used in the court studio's training and production would have been considered the Sultan's property. The lack of response to this group of images in Venice after Gentile's return argues that they remained in Istanbul. Mehmed's successor, Beyazıd II, strongly disapproved of his father's paintings and Christian relics on religious grounds. Angiolello reported that Beyazıd sold all the *quadri* (paintings) in the bazaar. Yet inventories of the palace treasury taken for him in 1483, 1496 and 1505 show that he kept many of the relics, and also stored books, manuscripts and illustrations.

Beyazıd would make pragmatic use of relics in negotiations with European rulers, and a congenial correspondent, the Marquis of Mantua, sent him portraits. These negotiations concerned Beyazıd's younger brother Cem (pronounced Djem), who had fled to Rhodes after two failed campaigns challenging the succession. Cem remained a threat in the hands of Christians who might attempt to install him in at least part of the Ottoman Empire during a crusade.

Beginning with the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes in 1482, a series of Ottoman ambassadors negotiated to have him kept under house arrest in return for an annual payment, eventually fixed at 40,000 Venetian gold ducats. In 1483, after the Knights took Cem to France, Beyazıd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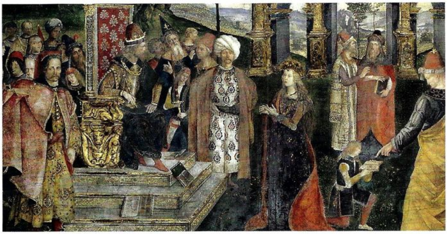
BRITISH MUSEUM

Ottomans in the Vatican

Left Bellini inspired the figures by the throne in Pintoricchio's 'Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria' (1493–94)

Below left and opposite The Bellini studies of a Turk and an Eastern European copied by Pintoricchio. In the early 1500s he reused the 'Standing Turk' in a mural at the Piccolomini Library in Siena. Depictions of individuals of various ethnicities made popular diplomatic gifts

Below and bottom left Bellini's 'Seated Janissary' (1479–81) reappears in 'The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian' (1492–98). Both of these Pintoricchio murals are in the Vatican's Borgia Apartments



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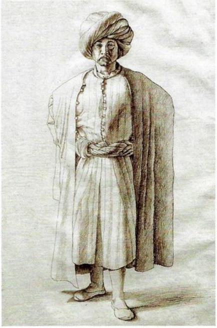
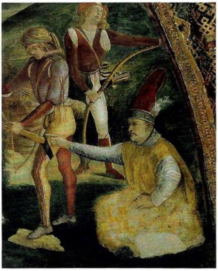


RMN-GRAND PALAIS (MUSÉE DU LOUVRE) / MICHÈLE BELLOT



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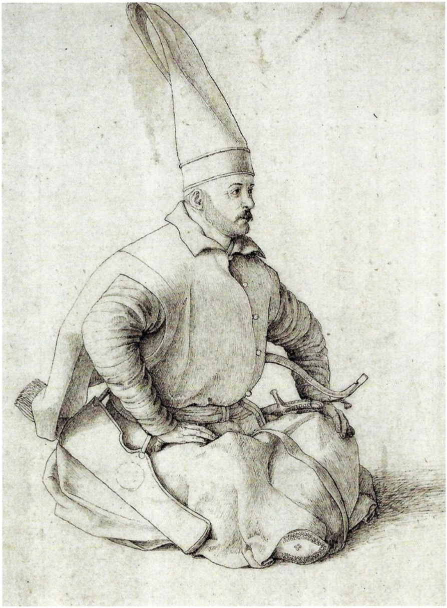
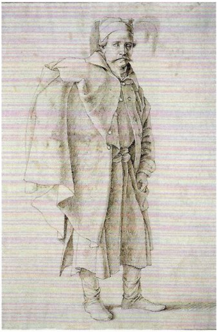


THE BRITISH MUSEUM

offered relics to King Louis XI in the hope of getting him to take custody of his brother.

After the transfer of Cem to the care of Pope Innocent VIII in March 1489, Beyazıd sent two embassies to the Vatican. In December his envoy Mustafa Beg delivered the first annual payment and personally assessed Cem's situation. Warned of a possible joint European and Egyptian attack, Beyazıd sent Mustafa back in late 1490 with a huge three-year payment in advance to sweeten discussion of peace terms.



STÄDEL MUSEUM – U EDELMANN – ARTOTHEK

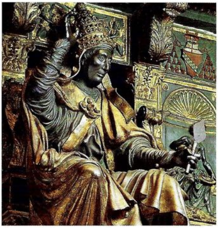
During the lengthy and inconclusive negotiations, the Pope opportunistically enquired about receiving relics said to be kept respectfully in the imperial treasury, particularly Christ's pierced tunic and the tip of the lance that Longinus had used at the Crucifixion. Sigismondo de' Conti, the papal secretary, recorded Mustafa's curious reply: Innocent could not have the tunic because Beyazıd wore it in battle to be invulnerable, as his father had done. He did, however, send the lance-head in May 1492 with his ambassador Kasım, who stayed only long enough to check on Cem and be warned by the dying Pope that European powers would retaliate via Cem for any attack on Christian territory. Subsequent events show Beyazıd becoming increasingly anxious and desperate.

After his coronation in August 1492, the Borgia Pope Alexander VI sent an envoy to announce his election and remind Beyazıd of the annual payment. He returned empty-handed in early 1493. In June, however, Kasım arrived with a 90,000-ducat payment to assist renewal of the terms of confinement and peace: two years' maintenance, plus 10,000 ducats to be presented to Cem, along with some textiles. The papal master of ceremonies, Johann Burchard, commented on the unprecedented cordiality between the ambassador, conveying the Sultan's hearty congratulations on Alexander's election, and the Pope, who mistakenly accepted the textiles as gifts for himself. Witnesses mentioned unsealed letters but no other gifts from Beyazıd. After Kasım had met Cem, Alexander dismissed the envoy with a letter thanking Beyazıd for his expressions of amity, and requesting non-aggression to demonstrate their mutual goodwill.

Did Kasım present the Pope with Gentile's *Janissary* and the standing figures that would soon be used by Pintoricchio in Alexander's personal suite, the Borgia Apartments? The two Ottomans attending *The Disputation of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (opposite, top) seem to express hope of a respectful dialogue between faiths and are based on Gentile's figures, but given more sumptuous attire. The figure on the left is also missing the plume visible in the drawing *A Standing Man* (left) that may have identified him as part of an elite Eastern European military unit. The seated janissary witnessing *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (opposite, bottom), however, seems to be an exotic accessory rather than an important actor. It appears that the Pope may have received more than these three drawings, as the rest of the Bellini *ritratti* – a Greek woman, a man from the Balkans and a poorly dressed Turk – survive in the same collections as the two standing figures.

The plot that had involved the Gentile drawings – which vanish from the story at this point – thickened during Kasım's return, when he stayed a week at the court of Francesco II Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, a renowned *condottiere*, political player and horse breeder. In 1491, a Mantuan envoy had initiated contact with Beyazıd to express friendship and acquire horses. Following the election of Alexander VI there had been multiple exchanges of secret, oral messages probably focused on Cem's assassination. In the autumn of 1492, Francesco had sent the Sultan a trusted courtier and swordsman, Alexis Becagut, with cuirasses, mules and a portrait of himself as a token of affection and devotion. Before Becagut's audience with Beyazıd, the portrait was passed around his *divan* and admired for its realistic face.

In July 1493, Kasım brought Francesco letters from Beyazıd and his grand vizier, along with textiles, bridles and bows. Francesco reciprocated with a gold necklace, a belt, Italian- and Turkish-style garments, and a painting of Cem with a Mamluk ambassador, acquired in Rome by the Gonzaga court painter Andrea Mantegna, who was working at that time in the Vatican for Innocent VIII.



ABOVE IN POLLAIUOLO'S TOMB IN ST PETER'S, ROME (1492–93), INNOCENT VIII HOLDS THE HOLY LANCE, A GIFT FROM BEYAZID II

Such a painting would have been based on drawings probably made when both men appeared together publicly, as had happened during Cem's arrival in Rome in March 1489. A Mamluk ambassador who had been there for several months saluted Cem outside the city gate, then rode with his Turkish attendants through crowded streets to the Vatican. Mamluk envoys visited Rome again in March and December 1490. Francesco evidently believed that Beyazıd would welcome information on a Mamluk embassy to the Vatican as well as a likeness of Cem.

After another Mantuan embassy to Beyazıd, Kasım unexpectedly arrived in Venice in November 1494 on urgent missions to Mantua and the Vatican. So important were relations with Francesco that he brought with him 40 horses and the Tunic of Christ denied to Innocent VIII – as well as the 40,000 ducats Pope Alexander had requested to help defend himself against Charles VIII of France. Charles was invading Italy to assert his claim to the Kingdom of Naples, allegedly so as to launch an attack on the Ottomans spearheaded by Cem.

En route to Rome, Kasım joined a papal envoy returning from Istanbul. Near Ancona enemies of the Pope ambushed them. Kasım relinquished the ducats and escaped to Mantuan protection, as Francesco soon reported to Beyazıd. Among the papal envoy's papers were five letters Beyazıd had written in September: one proposed that Alexander have Cem killed for 300,000 ducats, payable upon receipt of the corpse. Its authenticity remains an open question.

Francesco must have been as relieved as Beyazıd to learn that in February 1495 Cem had died, apparently of natural causes, in Charles VIII's custody in Naples. ◆

Rosamond E Mack is the author of 'Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600' (University of California Press, 2001, translated into Turkish 2005)

CHRISTMAS IN RUINS

LAST CHRISTMAS, THE ART HISTORIAN FRANCIS RUSSELL ESCAPED THE FESTIVITIES FOR A HECTIC WEEK REVISITING THE AEGEAN'S MOST FASCINATING HISTORIC SITES, IN READINESS FOR A NEW, ENLARGED EDITION OF HIS GUIDE 'PLACES IN TURKEY: A POCKET GRAND TOUR'. HERE IS HIS DIARY OF AN ACTION-PACKED WEEK

DECEMBER 27

MILAS, STRATONICEA, THE TEMPLE OF HECATE AT LAGINA AND LABRAUNDA

Milas, the ancient Mylasa, is conveniently placed for the airport that takes the name of more distant Bodrum, which in antiquity succeeded it as capital of Hectomid Caria. The town is now an uncompromising commercial centre, but nearby Beçin, the successor of what may have been its original acropolis, was far more appealing in the morning sunlight than I remembered.

Seeing the flight of Hellenistic steps incorporated in the medieval fortress is as good a way as any of reintroducing oneself to the complexities of the strata of former civilisations; and the restoration of the key Islamic building has been reasonably tactful.

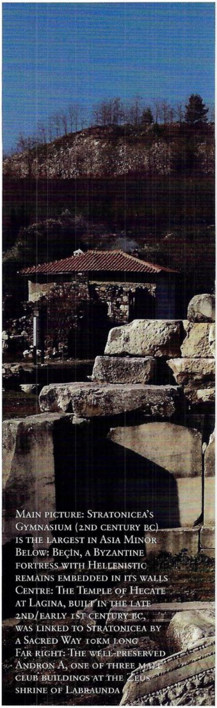
Stratonicea, Mylasa's neighbour across the hills to the east, was my next stop. When first I went, the village on the site of the ancient city was still inhabited: a helpful man was visibly puzzled by my gift of a packet of, to me, precious Bath Olivers. On my last visit, the charming little mosque was in advanced decay. That has now been carefully restored, but the houses have continued to disintegrate and no one bothers to pick the pomegranates. Excavation has continued, and sense has been made of the gate to the Sacred Way leading to the temple at Lagina.

The friendly dog that followed me may not realise just how much his world will be affected by the new line of the main road that will skirt the site to the north. Fine as the major monuments are, I am more touched by the recycled blocks incorporated in a Byzantine fortress, and by a crisp relief of an axe built into an abandoned house near the eastern wall.

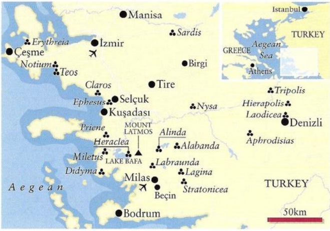
Always short of time in the past, I had imagined from George Bean's account that Lagina was hardly worth the detour. But Patricia Daunt, always so generous with advice, told me how beautiful the site is. And she was wholly correct. The curved propylon is one of the most appealing buildings of its type; and enough survives of the Temple of Hecate for one to sense how important the cult was to those who erected the numerous monuments that lined the stoas.

Ancient cities had rival shrines. Mylasa boasted that of Labraunda, on which its Hectomid rulers lavished their architectural attentions, with results that were magical in the soft afternoon light and the lengthening shadows.

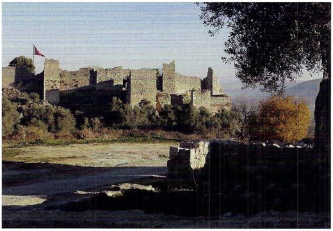
It was not for the ruins, however, that well over a hundred cars were parked beside the road that winds up to the site: Milas's drivers are on a pilgrimage of a different kind: a picnic in the gentle sunlight.



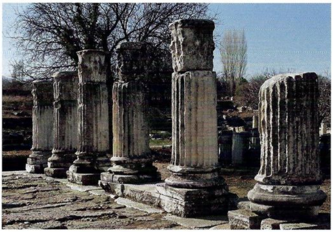
MAIN PICTURE: STRATONICEA'S GYMNASIUM (2ND CENTURY BC) IS THE LARGEST IN ASIA MINOR
BELOW: BEÇIN, A BYZANTINE FORTRESS WITH HELLENISTIC REMAINS EMBEDDED IN ITS WALLS
CENTRE: THE TEMPLE OF HECATE AT LAGINA, BUILT IN THE LATE 2ND/EARLY 1ST CENTURY BC, WAS LINKED TO STRATONICEA BY A SACRED WAY 10KM LONG
FAR RIGHT: THE WELL-PRESERVED ANDRON A, ONE OF THREE MALE CLUB BUILDINGS AT THE ZEUS SHRINE OF LABRAUNDA

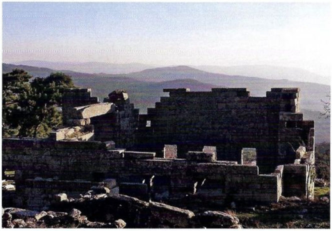


SUSANNA HICKLING



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: FRANCIS RUSSELL





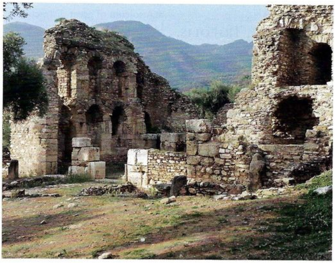
December 28

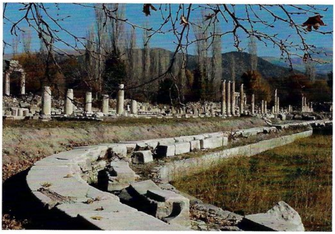
Alinda, Alabanda, Nysa and Aphrodisias

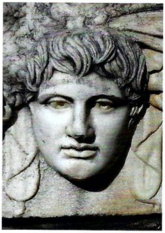
Unexcavated major sites become rather rare. But happily Alinda has not been touched. The great market building, with its remorselessly efficient rows of impeccably dressed blocks, hangs above the growing town. Higher up in the Theatre a couple harvest their olives. But I have the upper fortifications to myself.

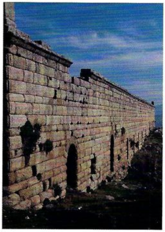
Work has been done at nearby Alabanda. And at Nysa, not seen since the remarkable Library was under restoration, much has been revealed on the left bank of the river. There were two other tourists, attending dutifully to their guide; and a group of local boys on motorcycles came from the town to amuse themselves in the tunnel through which the Romans channelled the river.

It was dark when I got to Aphrodisias, where Mestan's establishment has been abandoned: a pity, as I once found there a kilim which still makes me think of the golden straw of the summer in Anatolia, although – unlike Philip Glazebrook – I was much too mean to be tempted by any of the "antiquities". But, to my surprise, I found a perfect warm room in the village.







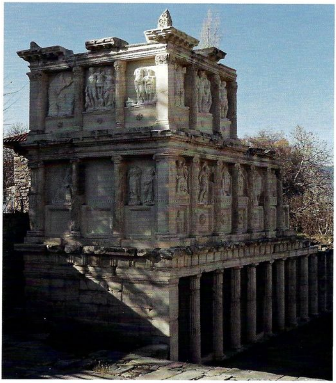


December 29

Aphrodisias and Laodicea

Surfaced to find that there has been a heavy frost: park my car in the sun to clear the windscreen while having breakfast. Aphrodisias is one of the great sites of Asia Minor, as thrilling on a sixth visit as on the first. I began in the quarries, and then made for the museum to see the newly installed reliefs from the Sebasteion. I had these, and indeed most of the site, to myself – as I did 20 years ago, when it didn't open for four hours after dawn and Mestan's dog guided me to a gap in the fence near the Stadium. Two Americans were there, and an elderly French couple in the Theatre. No one was looking at the admirable restoration work in the Hadrianic Baths, or indeed at the heroic reconstruction of part of the Sebasteion: five very happy hours.

I hadn't been to Laodicea since 1987, when the two theatres and the shattered Stadium slumbered peacefully and looked very much as they had to such early visitors as Wood and Dawkins, "discoverers" of Baalbek and Palmyra. The place has now been transformed, and busloads had come to wander up the main street to the great church, a reconstructed temple and other monuments, before gazing eastwards at the travertines of Hierapolis, gleaming white in the afternoon sunlight.



Top The Library at Nysa, the city on the Meander where the geographer Strabo studied
Above, from left The pool at Aphrodisias; a relief next to the museum; the great market building at Alinda

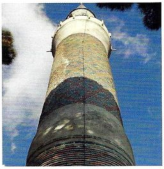
Opposite The 2nd-century AD Tetrapylon at Aphrodisias
Left The site's reconstructed Sebasteion, a cult temple dedicated to Aphrodite and the Roman emperors

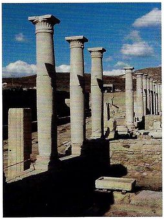
December 30

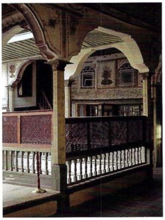
Hierapolis, Tripolis, Birgi and Manisa

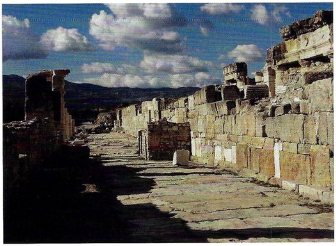
In August 1987 Hierapolis seemed a travesty. Commerce has now been swept away from the ancient town: the incomparable necropolis is untouched, but the stage building of the theatre has been reconstructed and the shrine of Saint Philip exhumed. A similar transformation is happening to the north at Tripolis, where, perversely enough, one is now kept from the monuments that used to be accessible but allowed to see what the excavators have unearthed. It was, of course, Patricia Daunt who had told me to return.

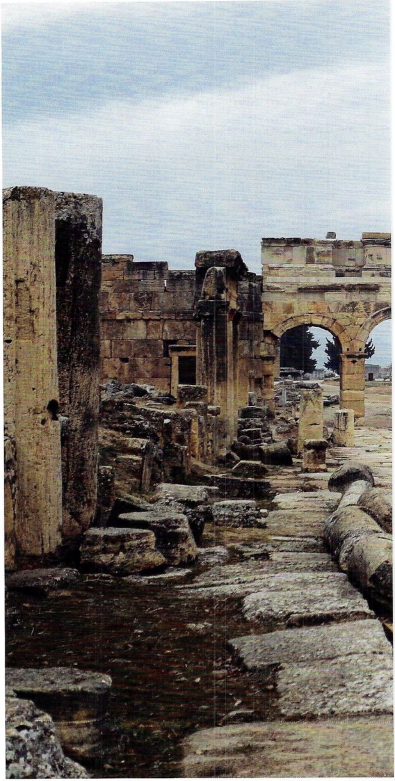
It seemed perverse to pass Sardis, but I was determined to visit Birgi, once the seat of an emirate, which lives up to its reputation as a town of immense charm. This would be worth visiting were it only for the minaret of the main mosque with its blue tiles. Beside this is a mausoleum of great distinction. Lower down, on the opposite side of the river, is the most charming 18th-century mansion I know in Turkey, the Çakırağa Konağı, now a museum. There are numerous well-built stone houses, whose owners' occupation is indicated by the tractors lined up beside them. The detour meant that it was dark long before I got to Manisa. I had no map, and finding my way through large, unfamiliar towns at night is never much fun. But miraculously I parked a few minutes' walk from the hotel I had booked.











Left, clockwise from top The minaret of Birgi's Ulucami (1312), with its glazed-brick decoration; the enchanting Çakırağa Konağı, an 18th-century Ottoman merchant's house, now a museum; views of the newly excavated colonnaded street at Tripolis, originally 450m long – a mural of a leopard has been found in one of its Roman shops

Above The colonnaded street of Hierapolis, with the triumphal arch dedicated to the Emperor Domitian in 83AD – on the right is the latrine. The city had been used as a thermal spa since 190BC and shares the same hot springs as the famous white calcite pools of Pamukkale

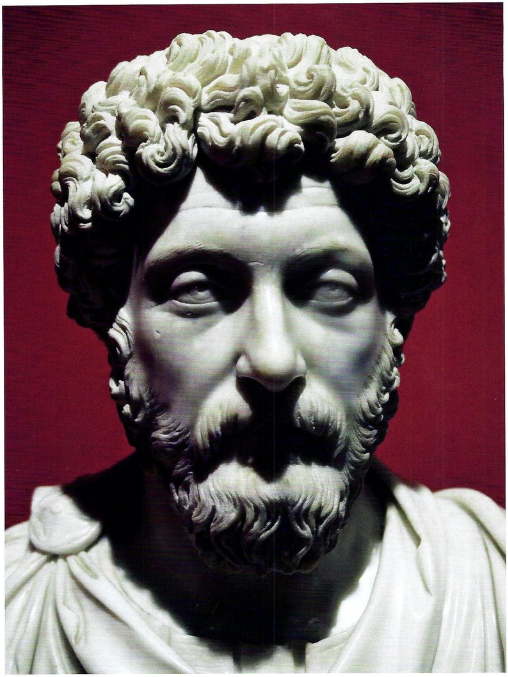
December 31

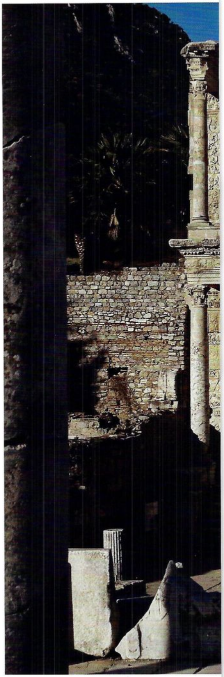
Manisa and Tire

There is much to be said for seeing the monuments of a large town before it fully wakes up. Those of Manisa are concentrated below the slope of the steep hill behind. The splendid Ottoman mosques were slow to open, but at the museum I found the ticket vendor shivering in a hut. By the time I had walked up to the Ulu Cami it had begun to snow. Briefly I feared that the snow would stop me from leaving, and some trucks were in trouble on the pass to the west. But slowly the sun prevailed.

Tire was as satisfying as Birgi, and it was reassuring to see work under way at the Bedesten (covered market) and the finest of the hans.

By mid-afternoon I was at Selçuk and, after choosing a hotel, was a determined tourist, spurred on by the miraculous light, which touched the normally rather dispiriting shell of the Church of St John with its magic. And the newly installed archaeological museum is altogether exceptional. I walked on to the robbed carcase of the great Temple of Diana and watched as the light drained from the great İsa Bey Mosque less than half a mile away.

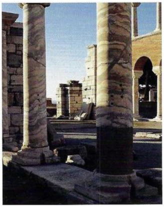




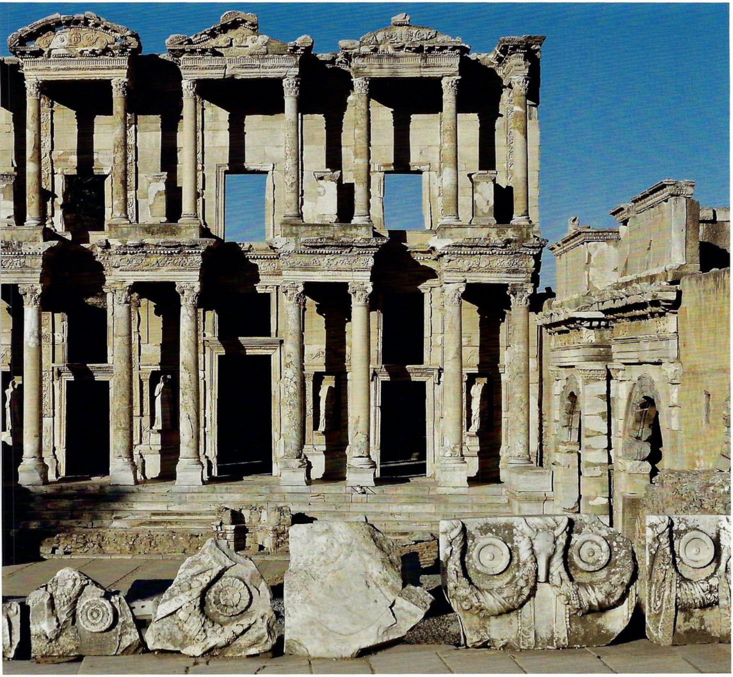
JANUARY 1

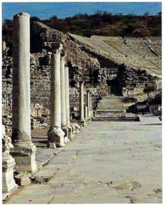
SELÇUK TO EPHESUS

After breakfast a happy walk in the early sun from Selçuk to Ephesus. Rather miraculously, this was advertised as closed, and so for almost three hours I had the place quite literally to myself. What photographs a really efficient cameraman could have taken! I had forgotten how many cats there were, and wondered if a kitten that had somehow got into my car at Priene eight years ago had survived, as a man at the restaurant had assured me he would see that it did.

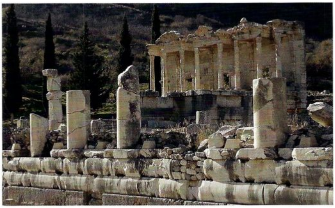


The Library of Celsus is perhaps the most photographed classical building in Turkey, the façade clearly intended to be seen first at an oblique angle from the great road descending from the Magnesia Gate. But other monuments are almost equally remarkable, as is the way they complement each other. At many sites it is the theatres that impress. To me that at Ephesus is most memorable as a vantage point to look down the broad paved street that led to the ancient harbour, long since silted up. On an earlier visit I arrived up this street, after following the long stretch of the city wall that crests the ridge to the south.





Above The Library of Celsus, impeccably reconstructed, and the entrance to the Forum in sharp morning light
Opposite, top A still-gleaming bust of Marcus Aurelius in the Ephesus Museum
Far left The Basilica of St John in Selçuk, built by Justinian in the 6th century, stands above the tomb of John the Apostle
Left The Arcadian Way at Ephesus and the Theatre – the author had them to himself
Right The Library of Celsus seen from the Arcadian Way



January 2
Claros, Notium, Teos and Erythreia

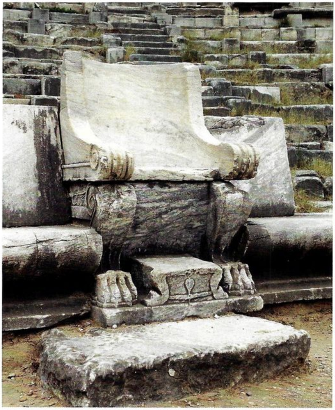
Much of the Ionian coast south of Izmir has been desecrated. Excavations have continued at Claros, and nothing is more beautiful than the view from Notium towards sunset. But Teos, which left so magic a memory on my first visit, is now fringed by development, although the site of the city proper has been respected. A fibreglass boat was tied up to the ancient pier. Even if it had been warmer I would not have been tempted to swim, as I did in 1987. Erythreia, on the northern shore of the Çeşme Peninsula, now boasts a marina but has not lost its charm. The acropolis is equally memorable for the view across the bay to Chios and for a particularly fine example of early polygonal masonry.

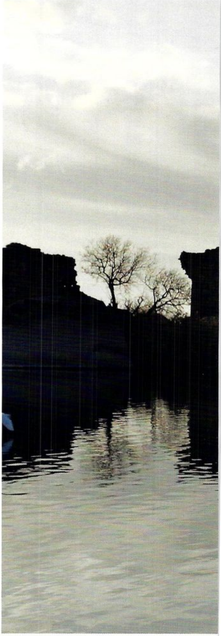
January 3
Priene, Miletus, Didyma and Heraclea

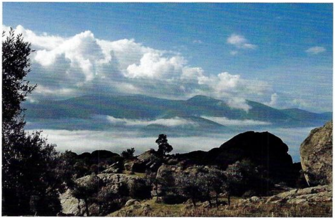
Grey cloud and cold winds cured me of any wish to climb up again to the acropolis of Priene. But the magic of the place quickly asserts itself. The Odeon is unforgettable, but it is surely near the bottom of the town, in the Gymnasium, where the names of numerous athletes were cut into the marble facings, that one feels closest to the ancient world.

By contrast Miletus, impressive as it is, is more impersonal. The new museum is well arranged, but the finest sculpture, a fragmentary *kouros*, is evidently deemed to be provocative and largely shielded from view, not that there was anyone else to shield it from.

Even at Didyma, a heroic building by any standard, there was virtually no one. So it was not surprising to be the only guest in the admirable Agora Pansiyon at Heraclea – which with Selge, Termessos, Pinara and Hoyran is one of the most magical places I know.







January 4
Heraclea and Mount Latmos

Rain was promised, and it arrived, with energy. By ten, on what, frustratingly, was my last morning, it seemed less insistent, and the proprietor's son, Mithat, agreed to help me find the nearest of the early rock drawings on the flank of Mount Latmos, and a frescoed Byzantine shrine.

As we walked up through swathes of mist, Lake Bafa came into view and vanished, only to re-emerge; we had sudden apparitions of rocky ridges erupting from the cloud. Mithat talked of the German archaeologists who have so greatly extended our knowledge of Heraclea and Mount Latmos; of his personal role in helping to mark walking trails; and of the need to encourage responsible tourism to ensure that what survives is preserved for the future. He talked, too, of his admiration for Richard Chandler, the first visitor from the West, who assumed that Heraclea was the ancient Myus, and of more recent visitors, including "Jeremy" (Seal) and "Patricia" (Daunt). He also

TOP LEFT THE 'THRONE' IN THE ELEGANT THEATRE AT PRIENE
ABOVE LEFT MORNING MIST OVER LAKE BAFA FROM NEAR THE YEDİLER MONASTERY
ABOVE LAKE BAFA FROM HERACLEA TOWARDS DUSK, WITH ONE OF THE BYZANTINE ISLAND MONASTERIES
RIGHT NEOLITHIC DRAWINGS OF STYLISED HUMANS ON AN OVERHANGING ROCK: THE NUMEROUS DRAWINGS OF THIS KIND IN RED ON THE FLANKS OF MOUNT LATMOS ARE AMONG THE MORE REMARKABLE RECENT DISCOVERIES IN WESTERN TURKEY

told me about the local doctor who on my last visit gave me the necessary injection after I had been bitten by a dog at the real Myus, and made me realise that Turkey has a model health system.

As we approached the shrine, a donkey came into view, followed by his owner, a beekeeper from a nearby village. Business is bad, a tragedy in a place where honey has been a major source of revenue for centuries. One can only hope that this revives, as nothing quite matches the orchestration of anemones and other flowers at Heraclea in the spring, which the hives, of course, make possible.

When I return I must have several days in hand and persuade Mithat to show me many more of the ten-thousand-year-old drawings of stylised men, and the chapel-cave in which Chandler himself wrote his name in 1765. But I must also retrace the incomparable walls and return to the island monasteries. ◆

Francis Russell is the author of 'Places in Turkey' (Francis Lincoln). A revised, illustrated edition of the book will appear in 2017. He is also deputy chairman of Christie's

Enver Pasha's fond farewell

A LETTER THAT MYSTERIOUSLY ESCAPED THE ATTENTION OF HISTORIANS CASTS THE UNREPENTANT DICTATOR WHO TOOK TURKEY INTO THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT. HISTORY IS REWRITTEN BY NORMAN STONE

Enver Pasha, along with Sykes and Picot, is one of the makers of the modern Middle East. Unlike them, he did not fade out. He was killed at a village in Tajikistan in 1922, after an extraordinary career, aged 40. He had become the military dictator of the Ottoman Empire, saved some of the wreckage of the Balkan Wars, then taken Turkey into the First World War at Germany's side.

The Turkish military effort was astonishing – a story of tremendous resilience, exemplified by the Gallipoli campaign, which made the reputation of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). In 1918, with the Russian Revolution, the Ottomans appeared even to have won, when the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Bolsheviks allowed them to take over much of the Caucasus. But in October, when Germany collapsed in the West, the Turks were forced into armistice.

Enver and his closest colleagues left on a German torpedo boat and ended up in Berlin (after a ten-day railway journey). Enver kept telling the Germans – their new Chief of General Staff, Hans von Seeckt, had had an Ottoman appointment in Palestine against the British – that they could collaborate with the Bolsheviks, and he eventually reached Moscow in 1920. The story almost deserves the lines of Samuel Johnson on Charles XII of Sweden:

The vanquished hero leaves his broken bands,
And shows his miseries in distant lands;
Condemned a needy supplicant to wait;
While ladies interpose, and slaves debate…
His fall was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress and a dubious hand;
He left the name, at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.

The ladies who interposed were Klara Zetkin of the Comintern and Isadora Duncan. The Comintern were trying to raise the Muslim East against the British Empire, and staged a conference in Baku in September, where Grigory Zinoviev harangued the various delegates in Moscow-Jewish German. Enver Pasha, nephew-in-law of Sultan Abdülhamid, was there as representative of the proletariat of Libya. But the Bolsheviks preferred to deal with Mustafa Kemal in Ankara, who refused Enver permission to enter the country.

The two men had known each other of old, as young officers conspiring in Salonica to overthrow Abdülhamid in 1908, and then as colleagues in Libya in 1912, when they were sent to organise guerrilla resistance to the Italian invaders. Mustafa Kemal, acting with great caution, did not want involvement in Caucasian, let alone pan-Turkish Central Asian, adventures. Enver did. He took up the pan-Turkish cause, failed to enlist the Emir of Bokhara, and lost his life on August 4, 1922, in a village skirmish, fighting the Bolsheviks.

Enver's last years have recently been chronicled by Murat Bardakçı in *Enver* (Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları), a book solidly based on family papers. There was only one woman involved in his life – his wife, Naciye Sultan, the Sultan's niece. Their letters are moving. She ran out of money in Istanbul, joined him in Berlin, where a son was conceived (whom he never saw; that son wanted to join the RAF in 1940 and died much later in Australia). Enver's life was superbly chronicled in Şevket Süreyya Aydemir's three-volume account a generation ago, and there have been good Turkish accounts of his relations with the Bolsheviks. But Murat Bardakçı's account of the last years will never be bettered.

'When we conspired together against Sultan Hamid, and when we sat together at the camp fire in the Libyan desert, we talked about a new Turkey, no longer a corrupted imperial relic…'

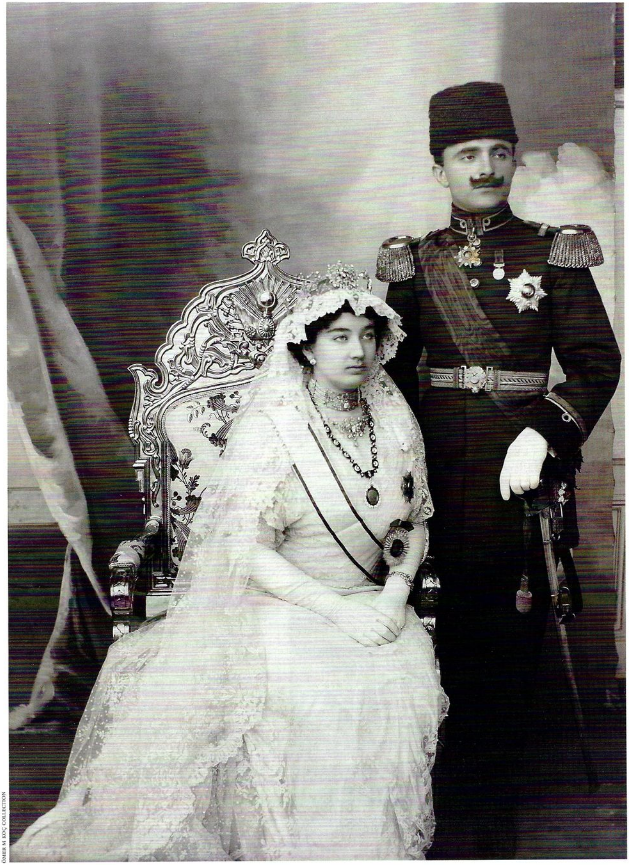
There is, however, one document missing. On the last night of his life, Enver wrote a letter to Mustafa Kemal. It was enclosed in the pocket Koran found on his body. It went through the Tashkent Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police, who translated it into Russian, but was misplaced in the enormous archive and has only recently been discovered. The Ottoman original has been lost, but the letter's opening has been kept – in transliteration from the Cyrillic, "*Khirmetle gezlerizden eper ve muvaffakatietinize her zaman dua ederim kardeshim efendim.*" (I kiss your eyes with respect and always pray for your success, my brother, my lord.) It continues:

"I know that this is my last night on Earth. Tomorrow I will face the Red Army, I have only fifty men left, and I have told them that they can celebrate the *Kurban Bayram* [Feast of the Sacrifice]. It is the end. News from Constantinople tells me that you are preparing a great attack on the Greek army, and I have no doubt that you will win. You will recapture Izmir, and then Constantinople. You have done brilliantly, using the Soviets two years ago, to gain weapons and money, defeating the Armenians and then the French, and, last year, concentrating successfully against the Greeks. News of your victory ran all round the world: you have made a new Turkey. Of course you will now drive out the Greeks, and when you have defeated them, the British will give in. At least a part of Turkish lands will be free – not the Greater Turkey that I wanted, but at least not the quaint little Ottoman Emirate which the Entente would have reduced us to.

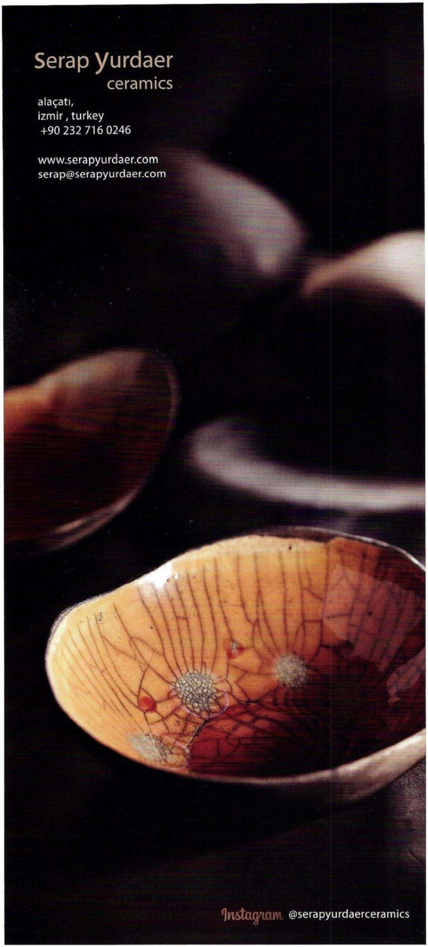
"At this moment, I want to make a confession. When we conspired together against Sultan Hamid, and when we sat together at the campfire in the Libyan desert, we talked about a new Turkey, no longer a corrupted imperial relic. In January 1913 I led a military coup, radically remade the army, and retook Edirne; but we were stuck as regards foreign obligations. The British and French confiscated our taxes through their Ottoman Debt Office to pay their bondholders. The Russians were able to forbid us to build a Black Sea railway, and, with their proposals for reform of the six part-Armenian *vilayets*, they were building (and arming) an equivalent of the semi-independent Lebanon that the French controlled. We lost to the Italians and to the Greeks.

"I took up a German alliance and then went to war with the Entente at Germany's side. I knew that you opposed this, and also that you were right. I must explain why I acted as I did. If we had done the obvious thing, and remained neutral, perhaps even declaring war on Germany in 1918, nothing in the Ottoman Empire would have changed. It would have been like the aftermath of the Crimean War: a victory in appearance, leaving us bankrupt. A Sultan would have gone through ridiculous ceremonials, five wives and all, brandishing the sword of a Caliphate that had no significance in order to control Arabs of doubtful allegiance.

OPPOSITE ENVER PASHA (1881–1922), THE YOUNG TURK WHO CAME TO HEAD THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, PHOTOGRAPHED ON HIS WEDDING DAY, MARCH 5, 1914, WITH HIS BRIDE, NACİYE SULTAN, A GRANDDAUGHTER OF SULTAN ABDÜLMECİD. (FROM THE EXHIBITION 'JEWEL', AT THE SADBERK HANIM MUSEUM)



ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION



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War in the Yemen would have gone on and on. The Capitulations would have prevented us from developing our own economy. The vast mass of the population would have remained unconscious of national identity, and illiterate. We would have counted, in Western eyes, as a sort of failed Japan.

"On August 1, 1914, as I signed the German alliance together with Wangenheim in the garden of his Embassy at Tarabya, I knew that we would lose. But in the short run, we were able to get rid of the Capitulations; and in the longer term, we would have a new Turkey, one that the world would respect. The key was to get rid of the Arabs. You and I, sitting at that campfire in Trablusgarp [Libya], used to curse the Senussi tribes, their unreliability, backwardness, hopeless parochialism and vanity.

"When the Ottoman Empire was a world power, its centre was the Byzantine one: we were the successor of Rome, and the greatest mistake was Murad IV's taking over Baghdad in 1638. That distorted the Turks' character, because we took over an ungovernable place, used a script in which only a few hundred eunuchs were literate, and had to use Greeks and Armenians to communicate with the modern world. Hamid had relied on Islam to knit his empire together, had built the railway to the Holy Places (really, to send Anatolian boys to fight in the Yemen and to stop Bedouin bandits from robbing pilgrims). But those Arabs were a millstone round our necks – tribes, stupid religiosity, and all that. We talked in Macedonia about this, and again in Trablusgarp. We had to create a Turkish nation, and we agreed that we would have to make them literate. You have noticed that I took the first steps in this, simplifying the script for military purposes. You might go further and just get rid of Arabic altogether: that way we shall have a literate population.

"But how do you get rid of the Arab provinces? There was an Arab nationalist movement, which consisted of fantasists whom we could easily control. But there were opportunistic tribal leaders, who looked with interest at the British and French, who supposed that they could control new nations in Syria and Iraq. The French had in effect already taken Lebanon and the British were in Kuwait. I knew, in August 1914, that the best thing that could happen to Turkey was for them to go on into that quagmire, and for us to be thrown back to the Anatolian heartland. That, in 1922, is what has come about. We will at last have a chance to be again what we were four centuries ago, though in a different form – a sort of Byzantium that worked.

"I knew that, with my court connections, I was not the right man, whereas you were, and I deliberately demonstrated some hostility towards you so as to build up your credibility. You will remember how, visiting Gallipoli, I did not visit you in hospital [this episode is recorded in Klaus Wolf: *Gelibolu, 1915*, p362], but I did this so as not to compromise you. I knew that you would be the man, free of all my connections with the old world, who would make a new Turkey. Now, in August 1922, you are about to do it. I, drawing a sword on a horse, charging a Bolshevik machine gun on the edges of the Pamir Mountains, will leave another sort of legacy which, maybe, some day, will make sense.

"*Aziz dostum, elveda* [Farewell, my cherished friend]." ◆

Norman Stone's books include 'Turkey: A Short History' (Thames & Hudson, 2010) and 'World War Two: A Short History' (Allen Lane, 2013)

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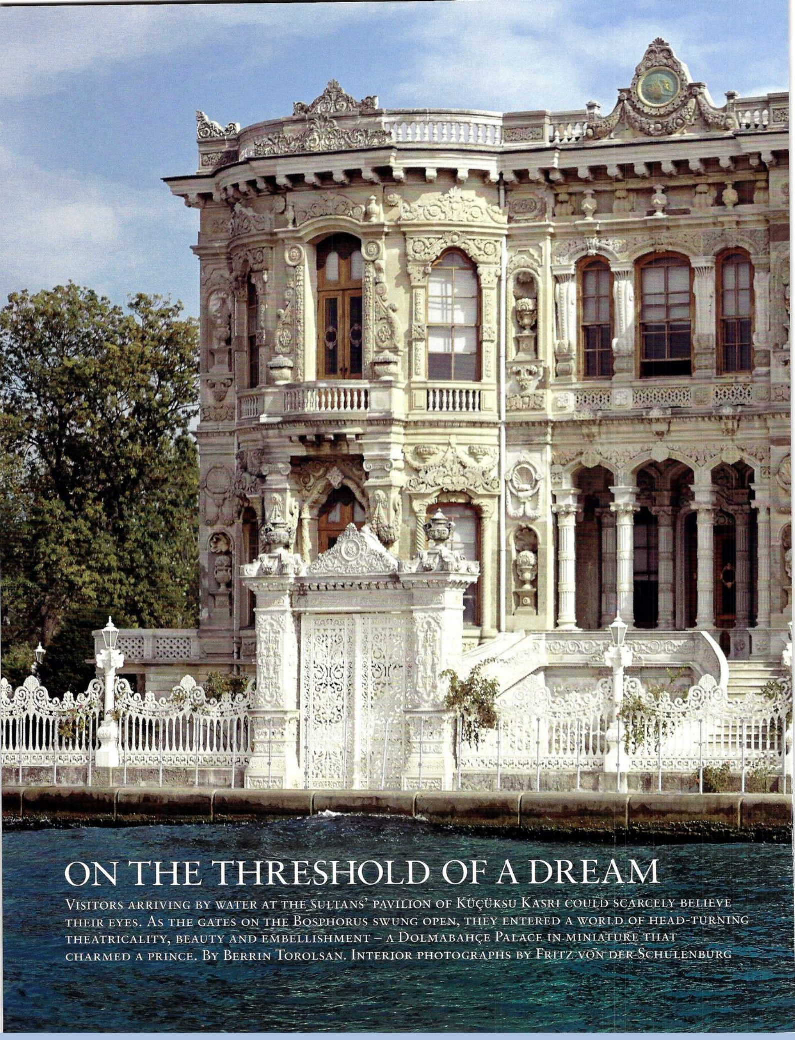
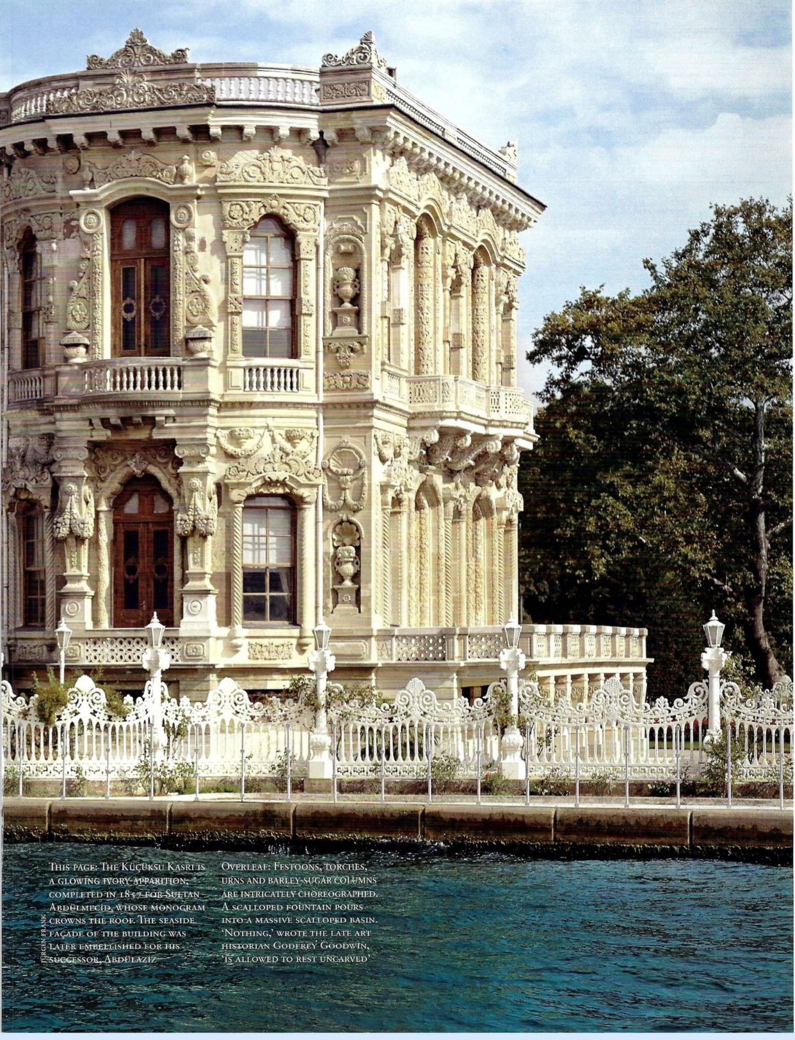


ON THE THRESHOLD OF A DREAM

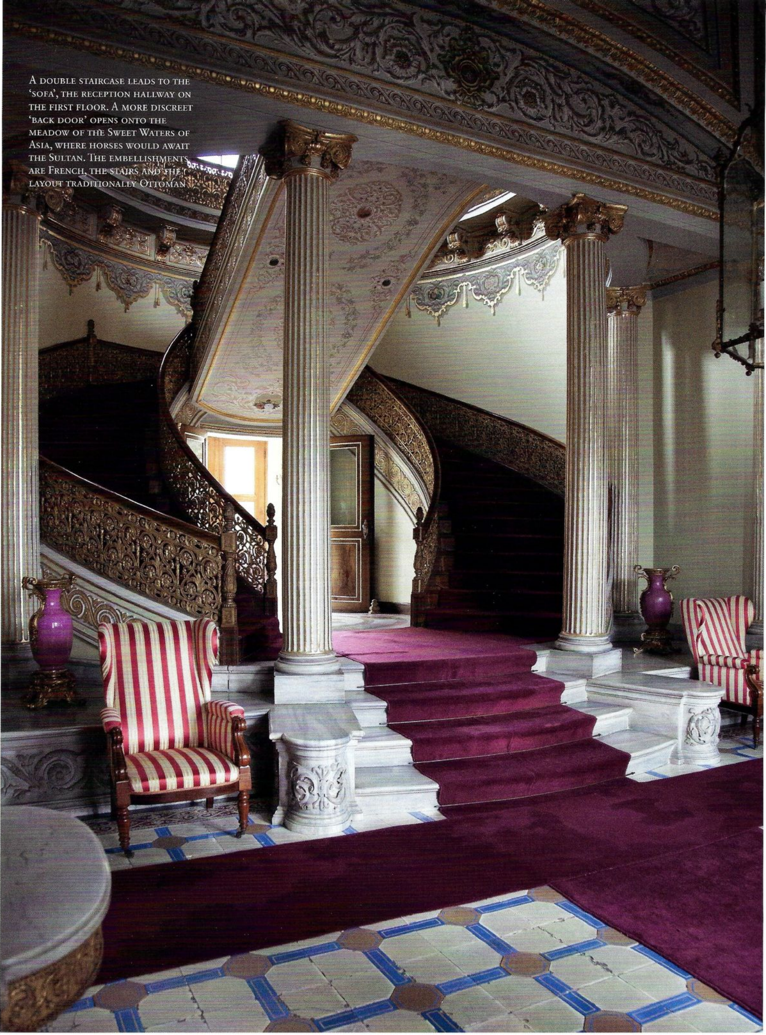
Visitors arriving by water at the sultans' pavilion of Küçüksu Kasri could scarcely believe their eyes. As the gates on the Bosphorus swung open, they entered a world of head-turning theatricality, beauty and embellishment – a Dolmabahçe Palace in miniature that charmed a prince. By Berrin Torolsan. Interior photographs by Fritz von der Schulenburg



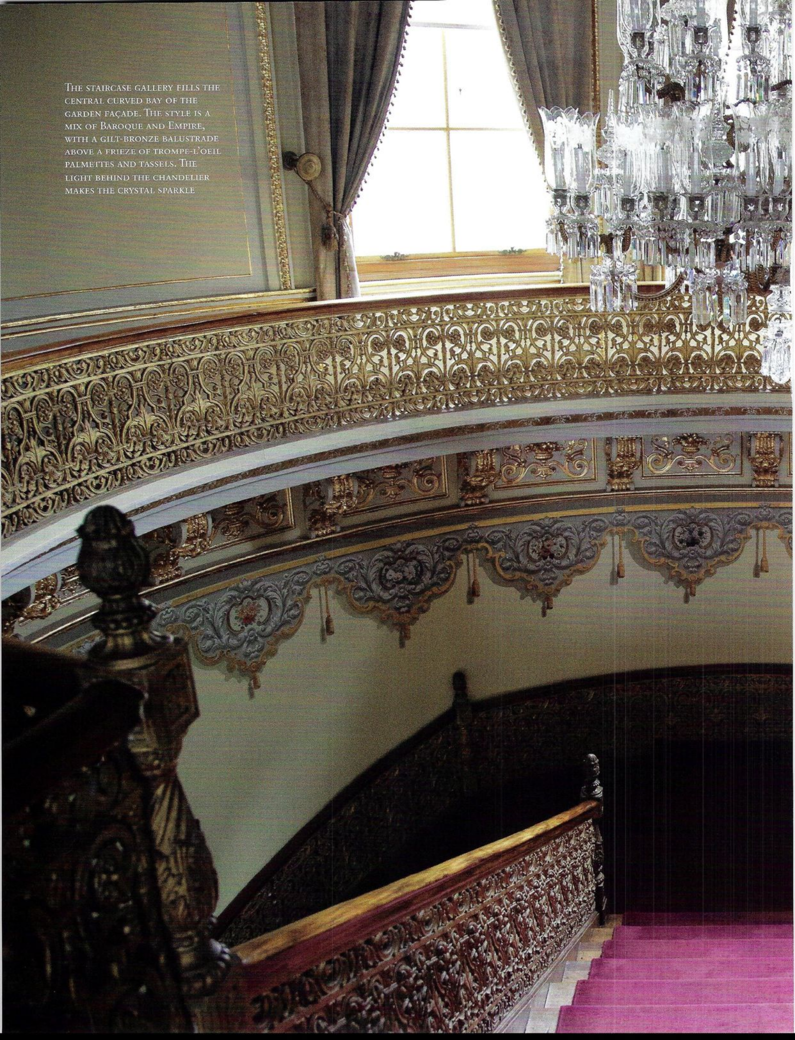
This page: The Küçüksu Kasri is a glowing ivory apparition, completed in 1857 for Sultan Abdülmecid, whose monogram crowns the roof. The seaside façade of the building was later embellished for his successor, Abdülaziz

Overleaf: Festoons, torches, urns and barley-sugar columns are intricately choreographed. A scalloped fountain pours into a massive scalloped basin. 'Nothing,' wrote the late art historian Godfrey Goodwin, 'is allowed to rest uncarved'

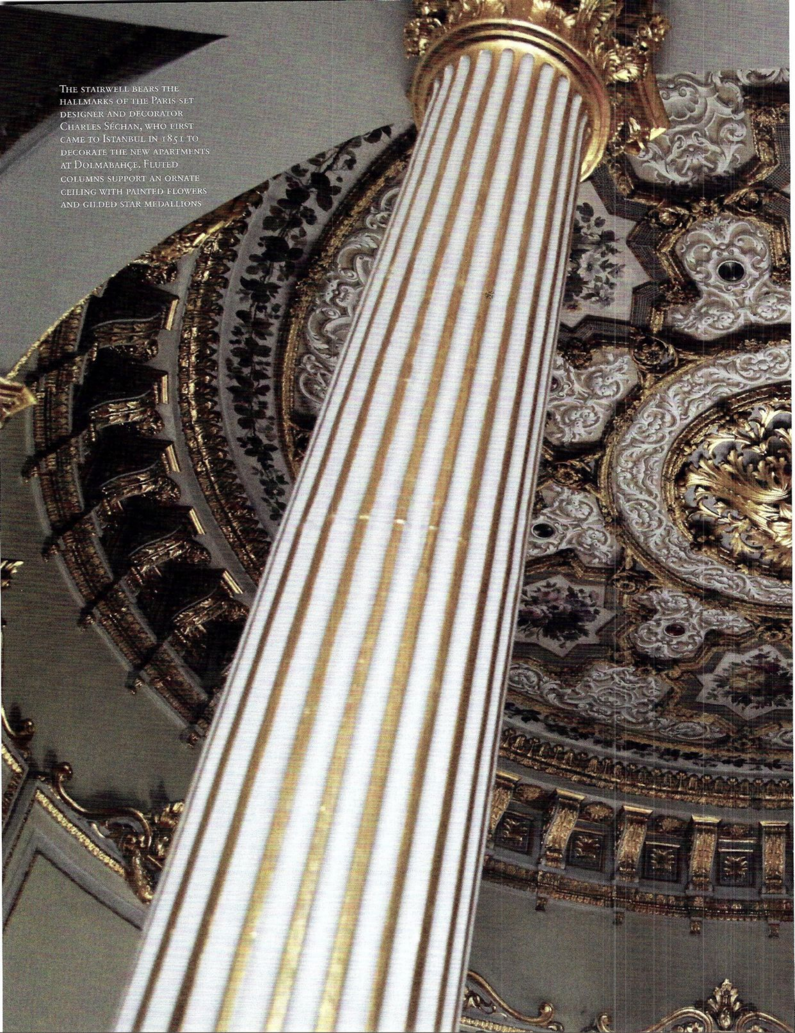
JÜRGEN FRANK



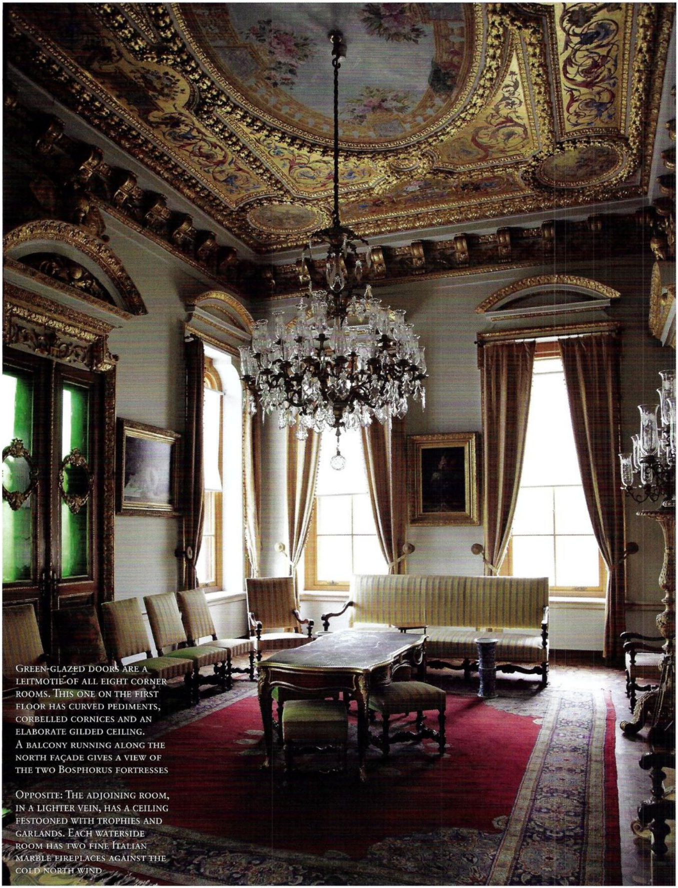
A double staircase leads to the 'sofa', the reception hallway on the first floor. A more discreet 'back door' opens onto the meadow of the Sweet Waters of Asia, where horses would await the Sultan. The embellishments are French, the stairs and the layout traditionally Ottoman



The staircase gallery fills the central curved bay of the garden façade. The style is a mix of Baroque and Empire, with a gilt-bronze balustrade above a frieze of trompe-l'oeil palmettes and tassels. The light behind the chandelier makes the crystal sparkle

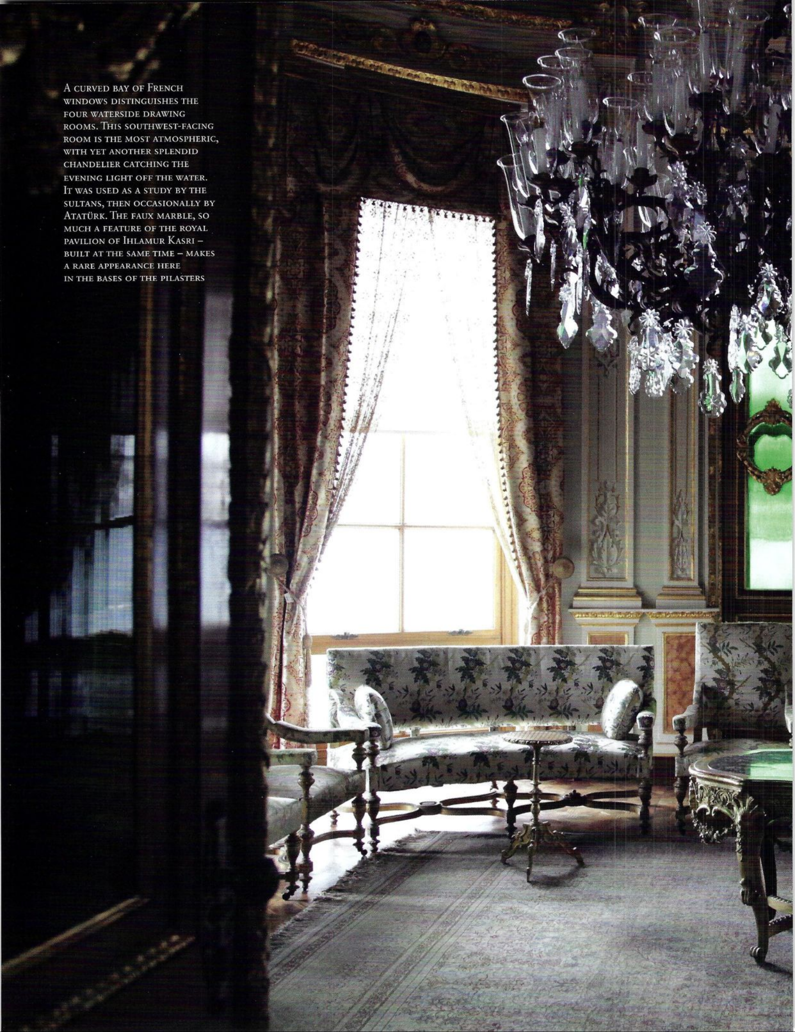


The stairwell bears the hallmarks of the Paris set designer and decorator Charles Séchan, who first came to Istanbul in 1851 to decorate the new apartments at Dolmabahçe. Fluted columns support an ornate ceiling with painted flowers and gilded star medallions

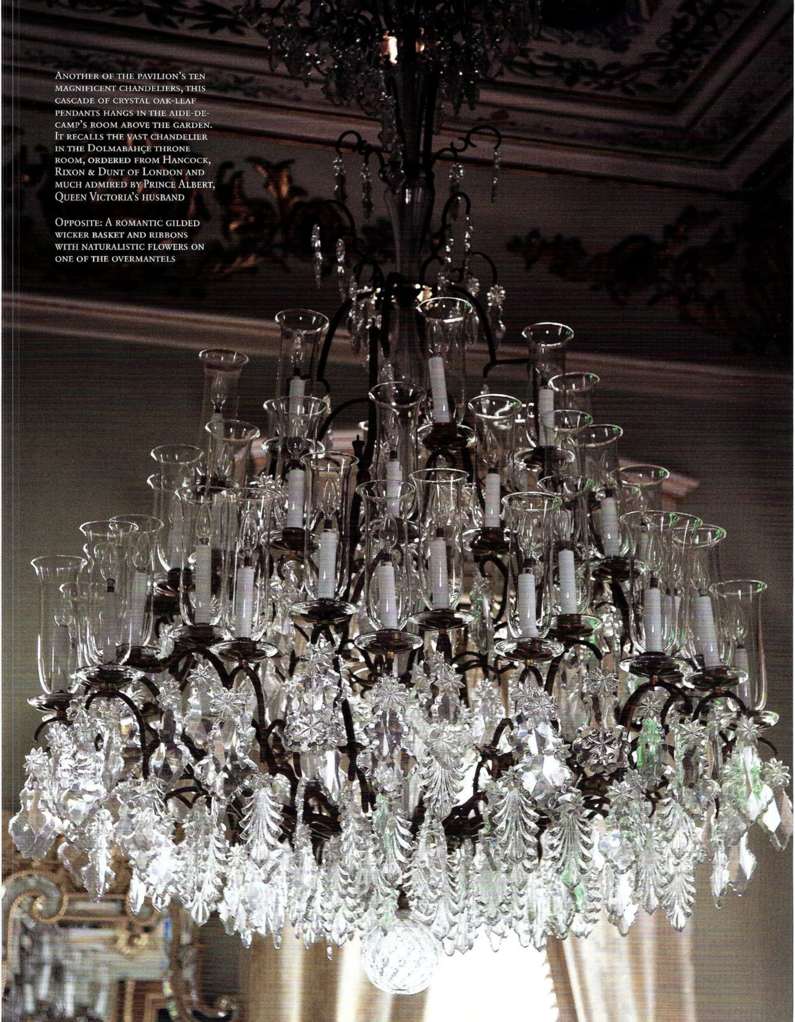


Green-glazed doors are a leitmotif of all eight corner rooms. This one on the first floor has curved pediments, corbelled cornices and an elaborate gilded ceiling. A balcony running along the north façade gives a view of the two Bosphorus fortresses

Opposite: The adjoining room, in a lighter vein, has a ceiling festooned with trophies and garlands. Each waterside room has two fine Italian marble fireplaces against the cold north wind

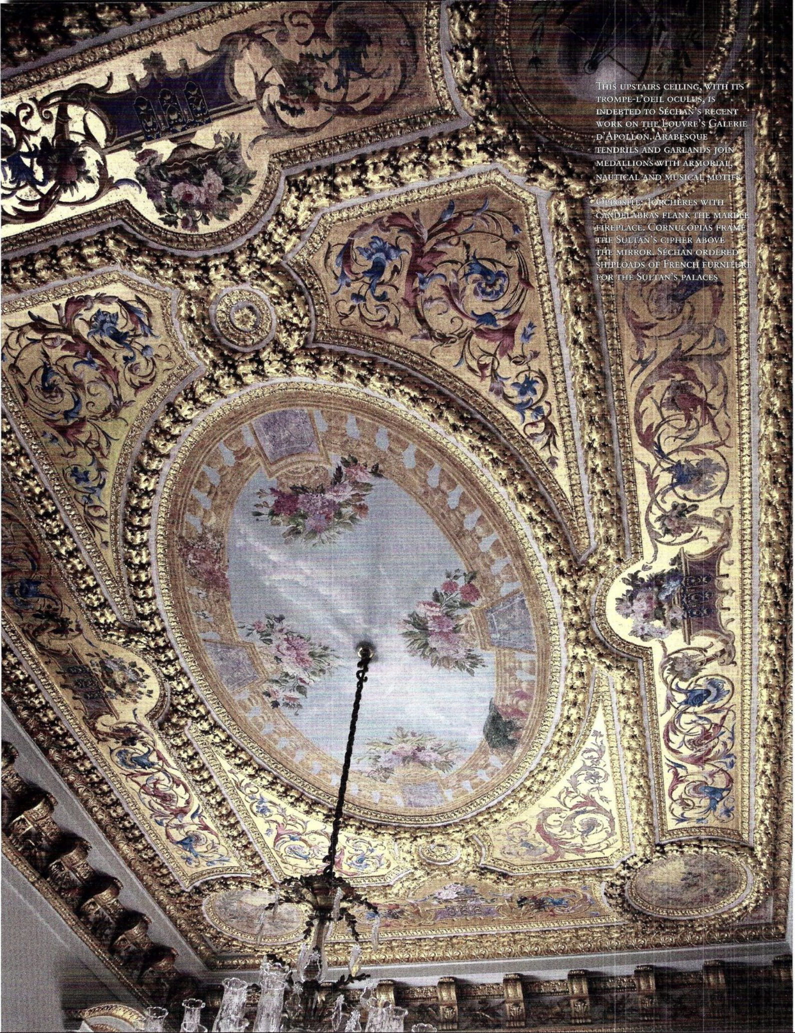


A CURVED BAY OF FRENCH WINDOWS DISTINGUISHES THE FOUR WATERSIDE DRAWING ROOMS. THIS SOUTHWEST-FACING ROOM IS THE MOST ATMOSPHERIC, WITH YET ANOTHER SPLENDID CHANDELIER CATCHING THE EVENING LIGHT OFF THE WATER. IT WAS USED AS A STUDY BY THE SULTANS, THEN OCCASIONALLY BY ATATÜRK. THE FAUX MARBLE, SO MUCH A FEATURE OF THE ROYAL PAVILION OF IHLAMUR KASRI – BUILT AT THE SAME TIME – MAKES A RARE APPEARANCE HERE IN THE BASES OF THE PILASTERS



ANOTHER OF THE PAVILION'S TEN MAGNIFICENT CHANDELIERS, THIS CASCADE OF CRYSTAL OAK-LEAF PENDANTS HANGS IN THE AIDE-DE-CAMP'S ROOM ABOVE THE GARDEN. IT RECALLS THE VAST CHANDELIER IN THE DOLMABAHÇE THRONE ROOM, ORDERED FROM HANCOCK, RIXON & DUNT OF LONDON AND MUCH ADMIRED BY PRINCE ALBERT, QUEEN VICTORIA'S HUSBAND

OPPOSITE: A ROMANTIC GILDED WICKER BASKET AND RIBBONS WITH NATURALISTIC FLOWERS ON ONE OF THE OVERMANTELS



This upstairs ceiling, with its trompe-l'oeil oculus, is indebted to Séchan's recent work on the Louvre's Galerie d'Apollon. Arabesque tendrils and garlands join medallions with armorial, nautical and musical motifs

Opposite: Torchères with candelabras flank the marble fireplace. Cornucopias frame the Sultan's cipher above the mirror. Séchan ordered shiploads of French furniture for the Sultan's palaces

On a fine spring day in 1862 the future King Edward VII sailed into Istanbul aboard the Royal Yacht Osborne. It was an official visit, but, as the 20-year-old Prince of Wales noted in his journal, "a most agreeable week". The Prince and his entourage were warmly received by Sultan Abdülaziz, then not a year on the throne, and were entertained at a sumptuous private lunch. Alas, the Prince makes no mention of the menu that day, but the Turkish grandees at the table included the admiral of the fleet and two formidable grand viziers, Fuad Pasha and Aali Pasha (at the time foreign minister). The Prince underlines how impressed he was by the rare honour of his host attending such a large lunch party, which sultans had never been known to do.

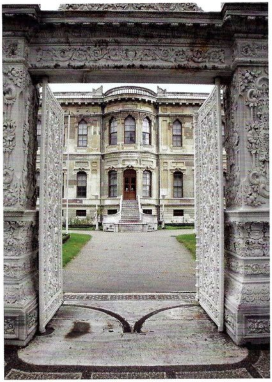
The setting for this historic occasion on May 26 was the jewel-like pavilion, the Küçüksu Kasrı, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. This imperial lodge stands close to the 14th-century Ottoman fortress of Anadoluhisarı, at the entrance to what was then a lush valley where a broad meadow separated two rippling streams, the Göksu and Küçüksu, known to the West as the Sweet Waters of Asia. Surrounded by mighty planes, ash trees and blue waters, the meadow had for centuries been the favourite beauty spot of Istanbullus. The 17th-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi described the Göksu as the elixir of life flowing from the mountain behind, surrounded by gardens, where lovers rowed their caiques and rested in the shade of trees. No traveller since has failed to mention the spot in their letters, and no Orientalist artist to make at least one painting of the scene.

This oasis was also popular with sultans. At the start of a golden age of fountain-building, in 1715, water from a spring in the hills was fed down to the imperial hunting lodge and fountains in the village of Anadoluhisarı. In 1806, Selim III erected an exuberantly domed marble fountain on the shore for his picnicking subjects that stands there to this day. A visit to the Sweet Waters often made a welcome escape from duties of state for his heir, Mahmud II. Mahmud II's son, the cultured Abdülmecid, who dedicated his life to modernising both his empire and its capital, ordered the old wooden yalı to be replaced by a stone pavilion in the Western manner to complement his Dolmabahçe Palace on the European shore. The new Küçüksu Kasrı, like the Ihlamur Kasrı, built at the same time inland from Dolmabahçe, was a miniature of the palace. The pavilions had neither bedrooms nor hamams, which indicates that they were intended for day visits.

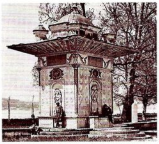
During the reign of Abdülmecid's brother and successor, Abdülaziz, the restrained Neoclassical exterior – still visible at the back – became more eclectic, with a plethora of Rococo embellishments. Scrolls, acanthus leaves, bunches of grapes, garlands, torches, vases, festoons, fluted columns, all intricately carved in marble and sandstone, were added to the three façades visible from the water.

As the 19th-century French writer Théophile Gautier put it, these Bosphorus palaces are "close to the style the Spanish call 'plateresco', which makes a monument's façade resemble a large piece of luxurious gold jewellery, with its profusion of complex ornamentation and mad details".

Particular attention was paid to the appearance of the buildings from the sea, as transport was by water. Gilded imperial barges, slender mahogany caiques (the sports cars of their day), and taxi caiques with many oarsmen, all glided over the waters, carrying passengers hither and thither. When the magnificent lace-like cast-iron gates swung open, visitors to the Küçüksu Pavilion were greeted with a crescendo of exquisite carving, culminating in a horseshoe staircase, reminiscent of Fontainebleau, surrounding a gleaming marble fountain with an enormous

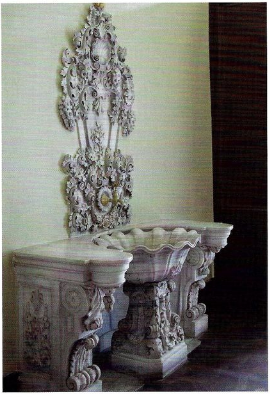


Left The restrained rear façade gives an idea of how the front would have looked before it was embellished. A mounting block stands at the foot of the marble staircase. The sultans used the lodge – called in Ottoman accounts a 'Biniş Kasrı', or mounting pavilion – as a starting point for rides along the Bosphorus, or for hunting parties in the woods nearby



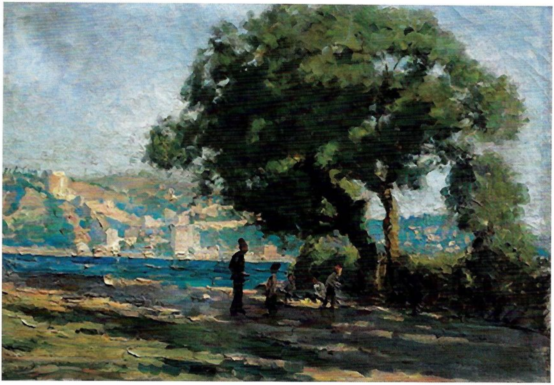
SUNA AND İNAN KIRAÇ FOUNDATION

Above The Mihrişah Valide Sultan Fountain, next to the pavilion, photographed by Sébah and Joaillier in the 1880s. Selim III built this 'pavilion' fountain in 1806 in memory of his mother when the Küçüksu Kasrı was still a wooden yalı. Drinking water flows from the fountain to this day



Left A splendid place to wash your hands: a basin with elaborately carved reliefs in one of the pavilion's four cloakrooms

Right The view from Küçüksu across the Bosphorus to the fortress of Rumelîhisari, by the Turkish Impressionist Nazmî Zîya Güran (1881–1937)



MSGSÜ ISTANBUL MUSEUM OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

scalloped basin. It was like stepping into a dream.

The architect, Nigoğos Balyan, scion of a dynasty of Istanbul-born contractors, was responsible for many of the new imperial buildings, including Dolmabahçe Palace. His two-storey structure at Küçüksu, built of stone and brick, stands on a stone basement. The upper floors both have the same traditional Turkish floor plan: four interconnected rooms, one in each corner, leading off a central hall or *sofa*. The waterside rooms are distinguished by curved walls with tall French windows opening onto balconies that make the most of views over the Bosphorus to the fortress of Rumelihisarı on the European shore.

Another flight of double stairs dominates the entrance hall, a sculptural, almost operatic affair with gilt-bronze balusters and a richly adorned circular ceiling. It is the work of Charles Séchan, a Paris set designer turned grand decorator, who worked on theatres all over Europe, from the Paris Opéra to the Musikpavillon in Baden-Baden and the new theatre in Dresden. When the French ambassador to the Porte, the Marquis de La Valette, recommended him to the Francophile Abdülmecid in May 1851, he had just finished the Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre for Napoleon III. By August, Séchan, assisted by his partner Léon Feuchère and sons-in-law Jules Diéterle and Louis Haumont, was at work decorating and furnishing Dolmabahçe. Gautier tells us that the "illustrious" Séchan's salon there was decorated in Louis XVI style. The Sultan was delighted with the result and awarded Séchan the *ordre du Médjidié*.

Right The solidly carved 19th-century walnut marquetry table in the upstairs reception hall bears the Sultan's 'tuğra'

In a letter from the summer of 1851 ordering architectural plans, drawings and materials, Séchan had warned Diéterle not to use bright yellow as the Sultan hated it. He also slightly ridiculed the imperial taste for pomp – a bit rich given his own penchant for gilded theatricality. By 1858, he had decorated the banqueting hall, the court theatre (pulled down in 1937) and most of the new imperial apartments.

Küçüksu's lavish ceilings have all the Séchan hallmarks: chocolate-box murals of landscapes, drapes, flowers and fruit. The parquetry is also exceptional, with a different pattern in each room that would have set off precious rugs from the imperial looms at Hereke. Fireplaces with surrounds of Italian marble are adorned with ormolu and matching bronze firedogs. Elaborate overmantels with crystal mirrors bear crescents and stars and the Sultan's cipher. The landscapes and still lifes are framed by richly gilded mouldings on the walls and over the doors.

The emerald-green panes of the glazed doors and the resplendent crystal chandeliers create a magical twinkling effect in the sunlit interiors. Prince Edward thought Dolmabahçe "pretty, & beautifully fitted up". He was undoubtedly just as impressed by Küçüksu, which he called "charming". ◆

Küçüksu Kasrı, Anadoluhisarı, Istanbul, is open 9–5, closed Mon and Thurs; millisaraylar.gov.tr

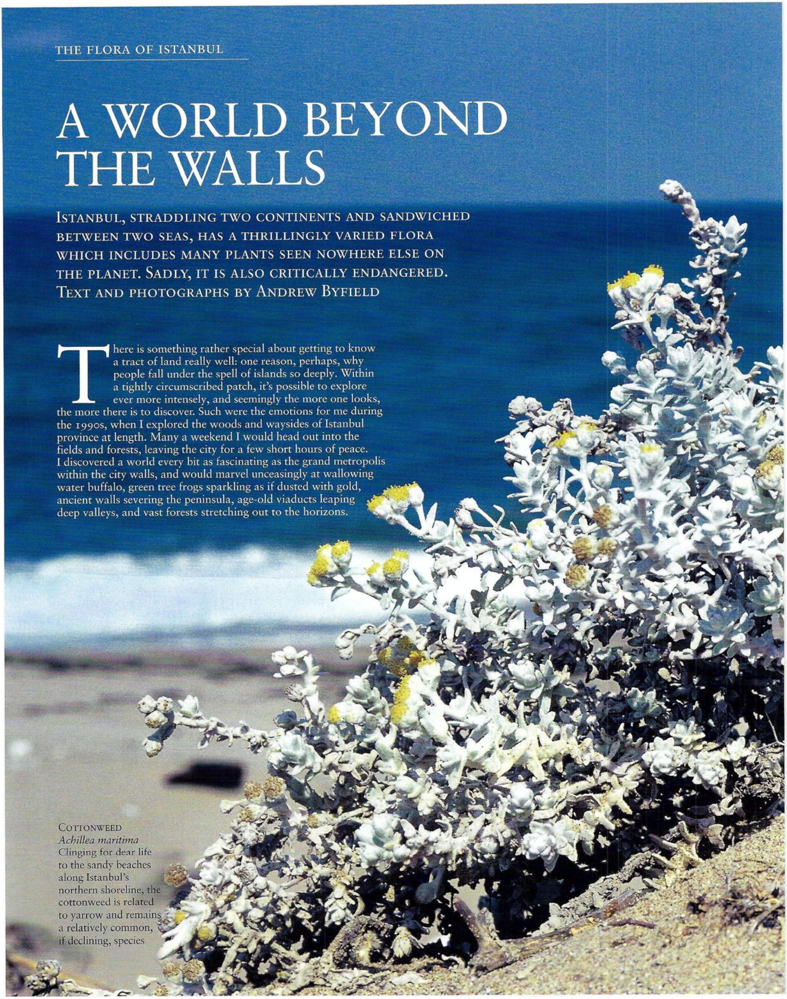
Berrin Torolsan is the author of 'At Home in Turkey', with photographs by Solvi dos Santos (Thames & Hudson), available from cornucopia.net at £22.95

A WORLD BEYOND THE WALLS

ISTANBUL, STRADDLING TWO CONTINENTS AND SANDWICHED BETWEEN TWO SEAS, HAS A THRILLINGLY VARIED FLORA WHICH INCLUDES MANY PLANTS SEEN NOWHERE ELSE ON THE PLANET. SADLY, IT IS ALSO CRITICALLY ENDANGERED.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW BYFIELD

There is something rather special about getting to know a tract of land really well: one reason, perhaps, why people fall under the spell of islands so deeply. Within a tightly circumscribed patch, it's possible to explore ever more intensely, and seemingly the more one looks, the more there is to discover. Such were the emotions for me during the 1990s, when I explored the woods and waysides of Istanbul province at length. Many a weekend I would head out into the fields and forests, leaving the city for a few short hours of peace. I discovered a world every bit as fascinating as the grand metropolis within the city walls, and would marvel unceasingly at wallowing water buffalo, green tree frogs sparkling as if dusted with gold, ancient walls severing the peninsula, age-old viaducts leaping deep valleys, and vast forests stretching out to the horizons.



COTTONWEED
Achillea maritima
Clinging for dear life to the sandy beaches along Istanbul's northern shoreline, the cottonweed is related to yarrow and remains a relatively common, if declining, species

Above
Cretan sun rose
Cistus incanus
This vibrant plant is one of two common cistus species in the heathland vegetation of the province, producing a glorious if short-lived display of flowers in spring

Opposite
Sea daffodils
Pancratium maritimum
One of the glories of the sandy beaches of Istanbul's Black Sea coastline, the great displays of gleaming white, sweetly scented sea daffodils bring the flowering season to a spectacular close in August and September

There were flowers, too, in remarkable abundance and diversity in Istanbul's fields and forests – some proving new to Turkey, others apparently new to science.

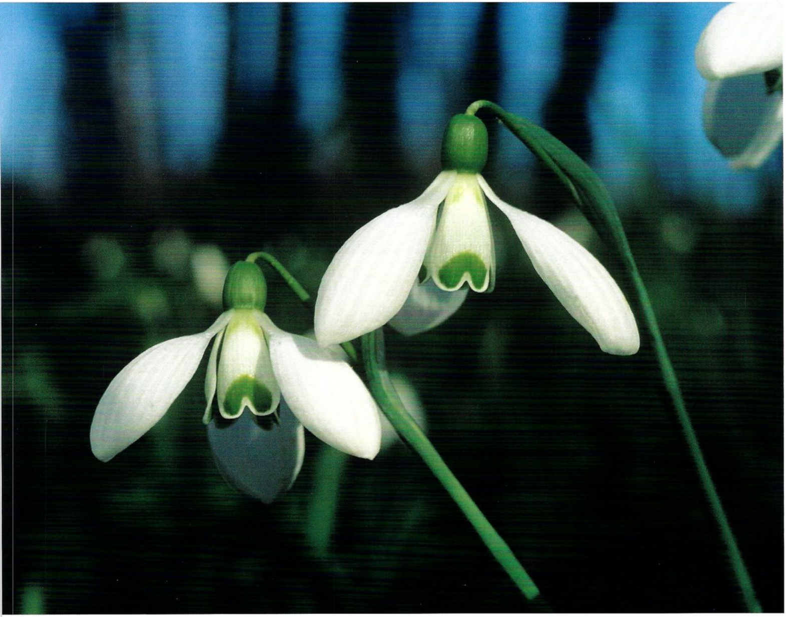
It was the Turkish botanist Georges Vincent Aznavour who first shone a light on Istanbul's rich and glorious flora. In 1885 he started systematically collecting plants in the Istanbul area, and over the course of 35 years amassed nearly 20,000 dried specimens, now housed in the Conservatoire Botanique in Geneva. Fortunately for us, he put pen to paper, writing the five-volume *Prodrome de la Flore de Constantinople*. Sadly for us, it remains unpublished. He died in Istanbul in November 1920, aged 58. His legacy is nearly 50 species described by him that were new to science, and an eclectic range of dandelions, dead nettles and thymes named in his honour.

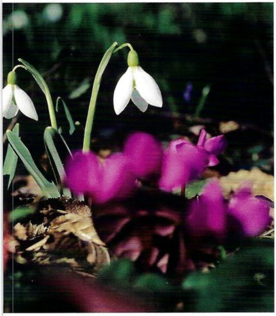
In good part through Aznavour's intense efforts within the province, we now know that over 2,000 native species occur within its 5,343 square kilometres. To put that into perspective, for British readers at least, that's a third richer than the whole of Britain (with 1,489 species), in an area roughly the size of the English county of Norfolk, equivalent to just two per cent of Britain's overall land surface. Furthermore, close to 30 species are largely or wholly confined to the province, including the glowing chequered rose-coloured Kadıköy meadow saffron, *Colchicum chalcedonicum* (remember, Chalcedon was the land of the blind, the first settlement in Istanbul, on the Asian shore), and the glorious, large orange heads of Hermann's knapweed, *Centaurea hermannii.*

This floristic plenty owes its existence to a number of factors. For starters, the province is situated at the point where Europe and Asia collide, so, as an example, only here does the resolutely European common snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, meet the Asian Byzantine snowdrop, *G plicatus* ssp *byzantinus*. This gives rise to Istanbul's very own snowdrop hybrid, which goes by the wordy moniker *G* x *valentinei* nothosubsp *subplicatus* (page 69), a plant that is common locally in woods and along forest margins. It is imbued with a good dose of hybrid vigour, so the wild plants are often every bit as fine as garden raisings such as Mighty Atom and S Arnott.

But more is at play here than merely the meeting of two continents. Arguably more important still is the fact that the province lies sandwiched between two seas, the cool Black Sea and the rather more Mediterranean Sea of Marmara (effectively a satellite of the Aegean). Prevailing winds from the northeast (ie the Black Sea) blow cool, moisture-laden air onto the land, whereas the southern shores are more influenced by an altogether milder, drier climate. So in just a few tens of kilometres the vegetation morphs from dense, humid forest to more Mediterranean scrub.

An enormously diverse geology also plays a huge role in shaping the flora: everything from granites and pillow lavas to soft and hard limestones, shales and recent sands and peats is to be found, dating from the Ordovician period, 450 million years ago more or less, up to the present time. As any botanist will know, such diversity makes for great plant-hunting. Finally, a long and diverse history of land management has shaped a variety of vegetation types: four are especially outstanding, and I describe them here briefly, working from the wet north to the warm south.





Above and left
Istanbul snowdrops
Galanthus x *valentinei* nothosubsp *subplicatus*
The faint green heart-shaped mark at the top of the inner segment of this exquisite snowdrop hints at its origin as a hybrid between the European common snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis* and the Asian *Galanthus plicatus* ssp *byzantinus*. They meet at the Bosphorus, and hybridise to create a fine range of vigorous plants in damp woodland and streamsides. Istanbul is the only place where this hybrid occurs in the wild, but in cultivation this pairing has produced some of the finest garden snowdrop varieties

Opposite
Snowflakes
Leucojum aestivum
Pretty as a picture, the delicate snowflake is related to the snowdrop but differs in having a single perianth of six fused petals (as opposed to three inner and three outer). The summer snowflake, at its best in late April and early May, still graces fertile wet meadowland on clays and loams in the province of Istanbul

The Black Sea beaches

Swimming aficionados know that the Black Sea makes for brisk summer swimming: it's neither as hot nor as salty as the Mediterranean further south. But a trip to the beach to look at plants is well worthwhile. Prevailing wind and wave action combine to force rich golden sands onto the Black Sea shoreline near Istanbul, sometimes driving sand up to a kilometre or more inland. Here, isolated from most of Europe's other sand dunes, a unique and distinctive flora has developed that is highly rich in localised endemics found nowhere else on earth. Istanbul's sand dunes have their own very special milk parsley, mullein, catchfly, knapweed, fescue, flax and woundwort, among others, and some bear scientific names commemorating the place from where they were first described.

Thus the dunes at Kilyos have their own knapweeds, *Centaurea kilaea* and *Jurinea kilaea*, though these have rather lost out in the battle between nature and development, for the area now lies under Bosphorus

University's summer campus, a shameful lack of appreciation on the part of the developers and a tragic loss. Istanbul's dunes have suffered more than their fair share of damage – from afforestation, sand extraction and construction of summer housing – but west of Terkos, on the European side, and between Riva and Şile, on the Asian, it is still possible to experience some of their botanical magic.

THE BLACK SEA FORESTS

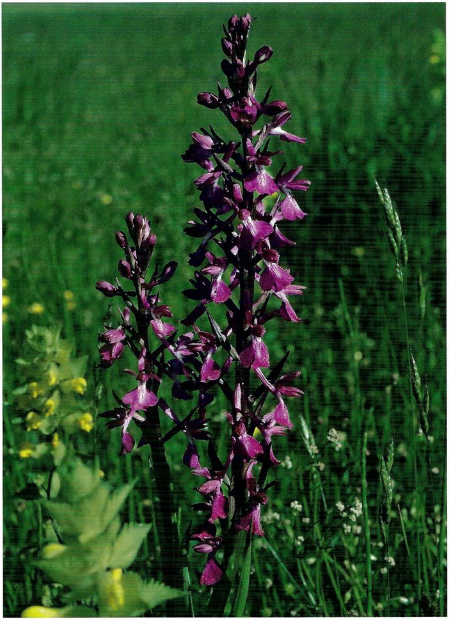
Istanbul's forests stretch as a glorious, enveloping blanket of oak, sweet chestnut, lime and beech across much of the northern, wetter part of the province, in places interrupted only by the occasional rock outcrop, coppiced clearing or cluster of small village fields. On the sandstone cliffs west of Terkos Lake, a jumble of dense woodland stretches right up to the cliff top, giving character to some of Turkey's wildest coastline. A squirrel could clamber from the Bosphorus to Bulgaria without setting foot on the ground. At their most verdant, these forests may appear to be wilderness, yet all are managed, most typically as coppice forest, cut roughly on a 20-year cycle to produce cordwood for charcoal production.

Indeed, travel the tracks and byways, and you are likely eventually to happen upon charcoal-making carried out in the age-old tradition. Far from being damaging, this cyclical clearance doesn't harm the trees, for they regrow. And the periodic bursts of light that reach the forest floor when a glade, or coupe, is cut as part of the coppicing process allow a fabulous ground flora to flourish. And fear not, harvesting and burning charcoal and fuelwood is relatively carbon-neutral, for carbon released through combustion is sequestered by the trees as they burst back into growth from cut stools.

Spring is the best time to search these woodlands, when they are at their lightest and airiest, and when drifts of the magenta primrose *Primula vulgaris* ssp *sibthorpii* (page 72), and the white, blue and pink Abraham-Isaac-Jacob (*Trachystemon orientalis*) are joined by a wealth of glorious flowering bulbs, including the ubiquitous *Cyclamen coum* (which despite its Latin name has never heralded from the island of Kos), early spring squill (*Scilla bifolia*), the jade-green snake's head fritillary *Fritillaria pontica*, and the dusky purplish-pink Turk's caps of the martagon lily (*Lilium martagon*).

THE EUROPEAN GRASSLANDS

Within the European parts of Istanbul province, and south of the main woodland belt, the trees and bushes give way to more open grasslands on the softer and more fertile limestone soils. Here high human activity over the centuries, taking advantage of the richer soils, has allowed the development of grassland at the expense of woodland cover. But again it would be wrong to think that man's long-standing traditional land use has done untold damage – in reality the grasslands are exceptionally rich in rare and beautiful flowers: heading some distance west of the city, fragments of juniper-covered downland can still be intensely rich in wild plants. Open grassland has an abundance of orchid species (I counted 17 within two square kilometres of grassland, including lizard, lady, early spider and monkey orchids), while scrubby areas provide a home to dragon arums (*Dracunculus vulgaris*), the red peony of Constantinople (*Paeonia peregrina*), and arguably the daintiest of garden clematis, the rich blue-purple *Clematis viticella*.



OPPOSITE
ISTANBUL CROCUS
Crocus olivieri istanbulensis
Though severely threatened by the inexorable westward expansion of Istanbul, the common *Crocus olivieri* still abounds on the soft limestone hills of southern Thrace. But just three colonies of Istanbul's endemic subspecies *istanbulensis* are known, in heathland on the acid hills on the Asian side of the Bosphorus

ABOVE
LOOSE-FLOWERED ORCHID
Anacamptis laxiflora
The tall purple spears of this orchid are still a common sight in wet meadows and unimproved pasture within the province

THE HEATHS

Finally, perhaps the most surprising habitat around Istanbul is its heathland. Yes, every year fragments of this precious habitat turn bright purple-pink as the local heathers *Erica manipuliflora* (with some Scottish ling, *Calluna vulgaris*) explode into flower. But where Scottish heather moorland can be botanically dull, the Istanbul heathlands are thrillingly rich. Two highly localised crocuses – the white *Crocus pestalozzae* (opposite) and the organic egg-yolk gold *C olivieri* ssp *istanbulensis* (page 70) – kick the season off in late February, while two meadow saffrons – the glamorous rosy-pink Kadıköy meadow saffron (*Colchicum chalcedonicum*) and the altogether plainer small-flowered *Colchicum micranthum* close the flower show in September and October. Through no fault of their own, they are all critically endangered. In between rare clovers (for Istanbul is the richest spot on earth for this agriculturally important genus), knapweeds, irises, onions and even the insect-eating sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* strut their stuff.

These heathlands still continue to produce "new" plants. I had the good fortune to find an exciting quillwort (a fern relative), but since the collected specimens bore just one diagnostic yet microscopic spore, the world expert at London's Natural History Museum could not be 100 per cent certain that it was a new species. Sadly, on returning to the site where I first found it, the link road to the Asian airport had been built over my treasures. No further colonies have been found, so we may never know the true identity of this mysterious fern relative.

THE VANISHING LANDSCAPE

Istanbul's greenscape provides a stunning backdrop to the city itself, and an invaluable green lung for its inhabitants, but much of it is also of high importance to international nature conservation. With its exceptional flora – approaching 30 flowering plant species largely or wholly restricted to the province, some of the most ecologically distinct sand dunes in Europe, the largest expanses of heathland away from Europe's Atlantic seaboard, and forest landscapes that have largely disappeared in the rest of Europe – you could be forgiven for thinking the effective conservation of this natural cornucopia was a high priority for the Istanbul municipality. You would be wrong.

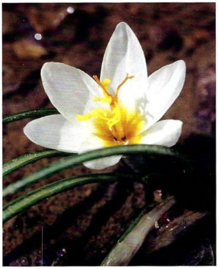
The province's wildlife and wilderness are under threat like never before, as developers and their backers see uncommitted and underutilised land as nothing more than a cash cow, and the municipality turns a blind eye to the environmental carnage going on all around. But the murmurings that gripped the heart of Istanbul back in the summer of 2013 give hope that, just possibly, change for the better may be on the way.

Opposite page, top
The remarkably clear waters of Terkos Lake, surrounded as they are by woodland, wetland and grassland, are home to the richest assemblage of freshwater aquatic plants in Turkey. But there is considerable cause for concern on the conservation front, not least thanks to recent moves to increase the lake's use as a drinking-water reservoir, and the threat of a new canal linking the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea

Centre, left
Frogbit
Hydrocharis morsus-ranae
A rather local species in Turkey, confined to flooded reedbeds, swamps and freshwater lakes with high water quality

Centre, right
Primrose
Primula vulgaris ssp *sibthorpii*
Identical to the common yellow primrose in all ways but one: the vibrant pink of its flowers. It is common in woods around the province, but is one of the many species that will decline as the practice of coppicing declines

Bottom
Water buffalo, wallowing in the wet hollows and marshes around villages and in clearings, are still an occasional sight in the vast sweep of coppice forest northwest of the city. Their rich milk goes to make the *kaymak* (clotted cream) found in Istanbul's upmarket grocers



This page, top left
French lavender
Lavandula stoechas
Relatively common on dry, rocky hills, particularly in the southern parts of Istanbul province

Top right
Alpine squill
Scilla bifolia
Bringing some welcome early colour to the woods of Istanbul, this squill (along with cyclamens and snowdrops) is a very common sight in damp, fertile spots

Bottom left
Crocus
Crocus pestalozzae
One of Istanbul's most special crocus varieties, largely confined to the province, where it grows in damp, seasonally flushed runnels and turf in the heathland zone. While plants in cultivation are often a pale blue-purple, those in the wild around the city are invariably a gleaming white. Diagnostic features are the tiny black marks at the base of each stamen filament, like 'tiny pellets of soil fallen into the throat of the flower', according to the great English gardener and crocus authority EA Bowles

Bottom right
Siehe's violet
Viola sieheana
Still common in woodlands, Siehe's violet responds well to periodic coppice activity, which allows dormant soil-borne seed to germinate

Travel notes

The best of Istanbul's wild side of woodland, heathland, grassland, wetland and shoreline is beautiful at any time of year, for spring comes early to the woodland habitats – in March – while the more heathy hills sport rare meadow saffrons as late as October. However, April and the first half of May perhaps offer the ideal time to visit for the greatest diversity of flowers.

As yet, the relevant authorities have designated very few areas as nature reserves or county parks, so most of the countryside is still a wild landscape unencumbered by car parks, visitor centres, signboards and the usual suburban furniture of protected areas elsewhere. Accordingly, it is difficult to recommend particular sites to visit. Instead, the visitor should simply head out into the countryside, and stop at a suitable-looking spot to botanise or walk. Much of the unenclosed land of forest and coastline away from settlements is owned by the state, so benefits from an informal open access for careful visitors.

The **Hiking Istanbul** project (overleaf) offers thrilling routes to walk, all of them accessible by public transport. Although local bus services do reach most villages in the province, a car may still offer the greatest freedom to explore.

Istanbul has spread at a horrific pace over the past decades, but it is still perfectly possible to find beautiful and rare plants on areas of grassland or scrub in urban areas. Unquestionably the greatest sweeps of habitat survive on the more infertile soils of the northern part of the province. A drive along the byways beyond Çatalca or Terkos Lake, or off the main road towards Şile, will reveal extraordinary landscapes, still managed much as they have been over the centuries. But the modern world is catching up fast, so enjoy these stunning landscapes while you can.

A WALK BEYOND THE WALLS

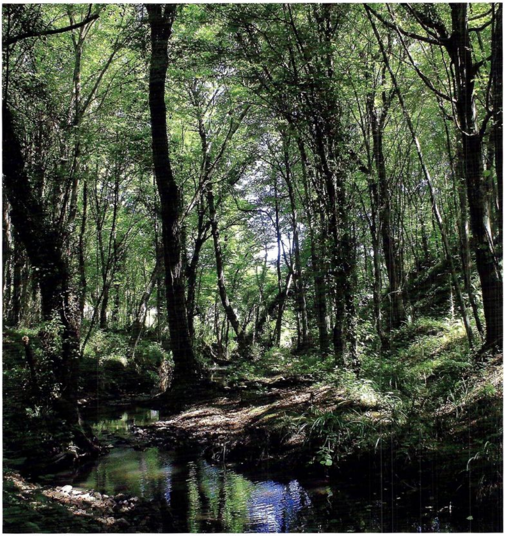
HIKING ISTANBUL IS THE BRAINCHILD OF THREE ISTANBULLUS – CAROLINE FINKEL, NICK HOBBS AND SUHA ÜLGEN. THE PROJECT'S AIM IS TO ESTABLISH A NETWORK OF DAY-LONG HIKES IN THE CITY'S RURAL AND FORESTED HINTERLAND. CAROLINE FINKEL PICKS FOUR OF THE BEST WALKS

Hiking Istanbul was conceived as a reaction to the city's megaprojects which are fast devouring everything in their path – a clarion call to recognise the value of Istanbul's environs for botanical, recreational and other non-commercial uses, and a welcome relief from the suffocation that is the urbanite's unhappy lot.

The hikes, averaging around 20km, run from village to village, on both sides of the Bosphorus. They can be accessed at various points by public transport, which is conveniently pushing out from the city's heart. Istanbul's online transport maps and timetables will help you plan ahead, and there is often a variety of options, including minibuses, though their routes can be hard to determine in advance.

We prefer to start our hikes at the furthest point, thus shortening the journey home after a long day. Travel times may be up to two hours in each direction, and we do advise checking transport options before setting out. We also recommend viewing the hiking areas on Google Earth.

For further information: facebook.com/hikingistanbul and hikingistanbul.org. A guidebook and app are in preparation. Walks are also listed at cornucopia.net/guide



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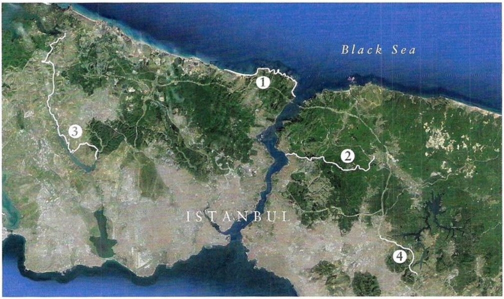
ISTANBUL'S GLORIOUS BELGRADE FOREST MAY SEEM LIKE A WILDERNESS BUT IN FACT IS CAREFULLY MANAGED



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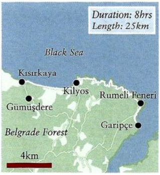
A hike along the Black Sea cliffs and beaches of Thrace

Garipçe – Rumeli Feneri – Kilyos (Kumköy) – Kısırkaya



MAPS BY SUSANNA HICKLING

1 The quiet fishing village of **Garipçe** is entering the modern world with a bang: the third bridge over the Bosphorus passes a short distance to the south, and a new container quay is planned nearby. Between Garipçe and **Rumeli Feneri** the path runs along the top of the cliff through coastal scrub and then woodland. Once clear of Rumeli Feneri, with its striking pillow lavas, clear paths run around the rocky headlands close to the coastal inlets and across sandy beaches. The once-pristine sand dunes that were so botanically rich lie behind the 5km-long beach west of **Kilyos**. At the end of the beach, turn inland to reach **Kısırkaya**.

Rumeli Feneri boasts the "Clashing Rocks" that Jason and the Argonauts had to negotiate in their quest for the Golden Fleece, and this stretch of coast has always been of great strategic importance. The fort at Kilyos is Genoese in origin, and you will also see Ottoman towers and forts, as well as fountains and the lighthouse at Rumeli Feneri. The concrete gun emplacements are of more recent vintage.

Access Outward: M2 metro to Hacıosman, then city bus 150 to Garipçe.
Return from Kısırkaya: city bus 152 to Hacıosman.

A hike through the Black Sea forests on the Anatolian shore

Cumhuriyet – Polonezköy – Zerzevatçı – Beykoz

2 Less well known than the Belgrade Forest of Istanbul's Thracian hinterland are the forests on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

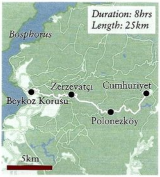
This hike begins in the village of **Cumhuriyet** (Republic), settled in the 1920s by Bulgarian refugees and said to have gained its name on the occasion of Atatürk's visit in 1937.

Forest tracks take you towards **Polonezköy**, which has remained a popular retreat for city-dwellers since Polish refugees first found sanctuary here in the mid-19th century. With its church and its Polish cemetery, it still retains echoes of this past.

Continuing through forest and woodland, you come to **Zerzevatçı**, which derives its name from the old word for vegetable-grower, though the village no longer produces vegetables on a commercial basis. Soon you will be heading downhill to the Bosphorus, with magnificent vistas opening up as you descend.

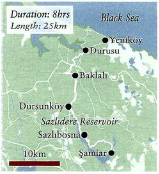
The final stage goes through **Beykoz Korusu** (*koru* means woodland) to the shore. The hike includes a couple of kilometres on the road around Polonezköy; we are working to reroute this section.

Access Outward: city bus 137 from Beykoz to Cumhuriyet.
Return from Beykoz: choice of city buses or minibuses to transport hubs, or *dolmuş motor* boat to Yeniköy on the European shore of the Bosphorus.



A hike in the European grasslands

Durusu – Baklalı – Dursunköy – Sazlıbosna – Şamlar



3 Leaving behind the coastal village of **Yeniköy** (not to be confused with its Bosphorus namesake), where the city's third airport is aggressively under construction, this hike shadows the line of the proposed canal between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara – as featured in the photographer Serkan Taycan's *Between Two Seas* project for the 2013 Istanbul Biennial (facebook.com/ikidenizarasi). Farming villages nestle among small fields and grazing lands on the low hills of this pastoral area. From **Baklalı** the stream leads you south to **Dursunköy** and the head of the Sazlıdere Reservoir.

If you continue south of **Sazlıbosna** – beyond the limit of what most folk can comfortably walk in a day, so perhaps on a second occasion – you will pass an ancient marble quarry, while northeast of the now mostly submerged village of old **Şamlar** can be seen the graceful curve of the dam constructed to channel water to the Azadlı gunpowder works – built in the 1790s, in the reign of Selim III – whose ruins lie a few kilometres further downstream.

Access Outward: T4 tram to Mescid-i Selam, then city bus 336K to Durusu.
Return from Sazlıbosna: city bus 336H to Mescid-i Selam.
Return from (new) Şamlar: city bus 36AY to Yenibosna.

A hike across the Anatolian heathlands

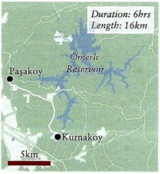
Paşaköy – Kurnaköy

4 Located on the slope of a hill, the farming village of **Paşaköy** retains its character, despite the highways circling menacingly nearby. Once a stream ran in the valley below, but in the 1970s this became the westward finger of the **Ömerli Reservoir**. Flooding has left a dramatic, gorge-like landscape.

As you head southeast out of the village, a bridge leads to a path through woodland which at times takes you higher up the hill over rocky outcrops. Views to the reservoir's craggy north side are dramatic, while a southern finger takes you south on clear tracks; you may meet beekeepers here. A shepherd's lair under the highway brings you to an inviting area of undulating heathland.

Despite the degradation of the landscape, it is still full of botanical surprises. Mature, little-frequented pine forest takes over at the ridge, with tracks descending to the margin of the city. From here a climb to the pylons on the hill to the southeast affords an all-round panorama. The village of **Kurnaköy**, end point of this varied hike, lies below.

Access Outward: M4 metro to Kartal, then a blue minibus to Pendik Köprüsü (2km); walk up the stairs to the flyover for a minibus to Paşaköy.
Return from Kurnaköy: city bus 132E to Pendik Köprüsü, then a blue minibus to the Kartal metro station and M4 metro back to the city.



The fine art photographer Brian McKee left Istanbul in July to explore the fabled sights of eastern Turkey. Renting a flat in the city of Van, he pored over a weighty survey by the scholar TA Sinclair and followed in his footsteps for 3,000 magnificent kilometres, around Lake Van, and north as far as the old Iron Curtain. In the first of a series of articles, he is inspired by Van's stark landscapes and isolated monuments

BEAUTY AND THE EAST

All photographs and introductory text: Brian McKee
Specialist contributions: Robert Ousterhout and Scott Redford

The old city of Van was founded on the eastern shore of Lake Van at 1,640m (5,380ft), on a lush alluvial plain, farmed for centuries. Here the visitor can still encounter tillers, harvesters and herders

Istanbul in high summer is sweltering. The locals may find relief in the cooling breeze that blows off the Bosphorus, but for some of us it's not enough. So my partner, the Japanese artist Ai Kijima, and I decided to pack our bags last summer and head east. We wanted to be in the mountains and near water, so we chose the smallish city of Van. We rented an apartment with a view of the lake and the citadel, and settled in there, keen to explore beyond the obvious beauty.

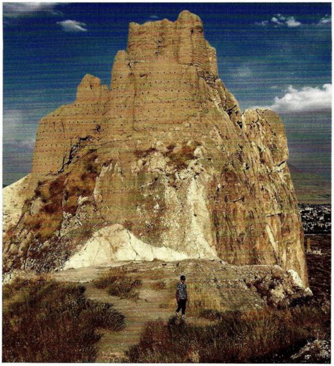
My work as a fine art photographer has taken me far beyond the borders of Turkey. I have done projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and just across the Black Sea in the contested region of Abkhazia, always preparing my research well in advance. For this trip, however, we made our arrangements at the last minute, and were happy to wait to see where chance or curiosity might lead us.

Then, on our second day in Van, I found inspiration in the writing of TA Sinclair, a scholar who spared no effort in searching out historic sites in eastern Turkey and in describing them in meticulous detail.

The text fascinated me, but I was surprised that very few photographic images accompanied the author's descriptions. So now I had a direction. I would journey as far as possible in the footsteps of Sinclair, to make my own photographic essay based on his travels. The images from this project reflect what I like to think of as a tacit collaboration between me as a photographer and TA Sinclair as a writer and scholar on his voyage of discovery 30 years before me.

TRAVELS WITH MY ART

CAMERA TO HAND, BRIAN MCKEE SETS OFF WITH HIS PARTNER, AI KIJIMA, ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY



The sun was setting as we arrived in Van at the height of Ramazan. By the time we found our seventh-floor apartment, evening prayers were over and it was dark. Yet in the street below, tables had been set up outside every store. People were standing about eating flatbread and food from vast pots, or sitting down to smoke and drink tea. Somewhere in the distance a band was playing. Looking down from our window we saw the true joy and vibrancy of the place where we would spend the next two months.

It seemed to us, in our fitful sleep, that the music and street life continued until morning prayers. Yet we woke to an empty fridge, bare cupboards – and absolute silence. Never mind. We would venture out for the famous Van breakfast about which we had heard so much.

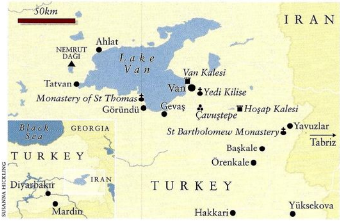
Our own street was deserted, but we were in the business district after all. Surely we'd find something on the next street, or the next. Nothing in Istanbul had prepared us for the utter stillness all around us. Not a shop, not a café was open. So this was Ramazan in Van, and we, an American photographer and a Japanese artist, wandered hungry and in awe.

In the days that followed, we learnt the ways of Van in Ramazan. Around noon, markets would open so families could buy food for their evening feast, but restaurants stayed shut until after evening prayers. In the markets, people seemed grumpy and distant, but by night, when the food came out, the mood lifted. We were among the kindest people I have ever met, with more invitations to dinner than we could possibly accept.

At weekends our apartment building was colonised by entire extended families of Iranians. The whole quarter would be teeming with them. They took over the cafés. They returned from sprees in Van's only modern mall and filled the hallways with discarded packaging. The young men spoke good English. I'm sure the young women did, too, but they would only stare and point and giggle – did I really hear "Brad Pitt" or was that just wishful thinking?

THE SECRET OF VAN KALE

You can hire a taxi to take you right to the gates of the massive Urartian fortress of Van Kale, but it's more of an adventure to travel by dolmuş – if you can find one. Van is packed with these shared taxis, running fixed routes as far as the Iranian border. You can go anywhere you wish. But whenever we asked, in our halting Turkish, where we'd find the yellow beast that would take us to the Kale, we'd be told to go just around the next corner – and the next, until we wound up right back where we had started.



SUSANNA HICKLING

Anyway, what was the rush? Our enquiries were met with the usual hospitality. Why not sit down and have *çay*? Not once were we asked to buy anything, and if ever we offered to pay there was palpable offence.

Unlike a taxi, the dolmuş drops you around ten minutes' walk from the Kale, leaving you to make your own way down the road to the ancient site, past a park newly furnished with swings and playgrounds, and encircled by a rather hazardous running track. It was here that the locals showed us where the fence had been cut so we could slip in the back way to explore this still active though neglected archaeological site.

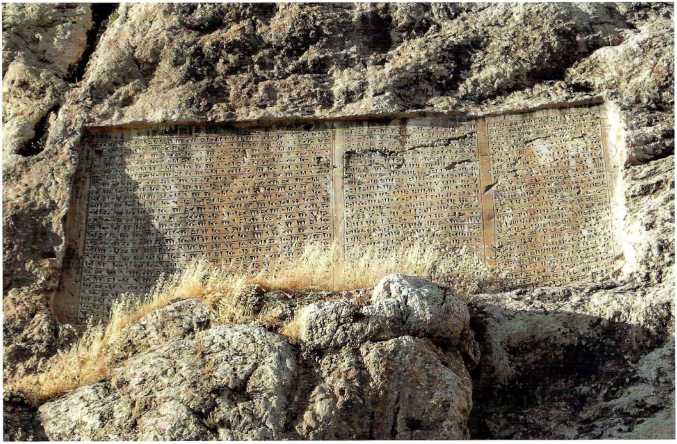
If you make the trek to the proper entrance, you will have a wonderful tourist's view of the front, and only of the front. It is at the back that the locals wander among ruined buildings dwarfed by the Kale, yet each so secluded, so private, with a sense of the monumental and profound that is not just about scale. The impact is indescribable, and I am so grateful that they let us into their precious secret.

ROYAL FLUSH

On our journeys to the regions around Van, we decided not to take a local guide – instead we had TA Sinclair's *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, which I had discovered. We hired a car cheaply and set ourselves to visit no more than two sites in a day.

Our second week in Van, with Ramazan still strictly observed, we headed out for the fortresses of Çavuştepe and Hoşap, both conveniently off the D975, the highway from Van to Başkale, the last Turkish city of any size before the border with Iran.

Çavuştepe, 25km from Van, dates from the 8th century BC, and, though not so well preserved as sites of similar antiquity at Van Kale, it does have some unique relics and is steeped in folklore. It is said that the invading Babylonian King Bel was slain nearby, and that the victorious Hayk established his fortress on a ridge close to the battle site, with commanding views of the plain below. Within the surviving walls are the



Xerxes leaves his mark The cuneiform inscription carved in the 5th century BC into the rock of Van Kale is in three languages: Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite. 'I am Xerxes,' it proclaims, 'the great king, the king of kings, king of all kinds of peoples with all kinds of origins, king of this earth great and wide, son of King Darius, the Achaemenid… May Ahuramazda and the other gods protect me, my kingdom and what I have made'. In 331BC Van was conquered by Alexander the Great, who respected its historical importance Above The door to one of the citadel's tombs, carved out of the rock for Urartian kings Opposite Van Kale's ancient mud-brick Urartian fortress

remains of a Urartian palace built in the reign of Sarduri II (764–735BC). You can see cisterns and storage rooms for wine and olive oil, matchless in their time. There is even a "royal toilet", one of the earliest running-water lavatories.

Excavations began in 1961, and in more recent times they have been slowly restoring the Temple of Khaldi, but there is much work yet to be done.

We were becoming used to finding ourselves the sole sightseers, quite alone. The ticket booth was deserted, and we just walked in. At first it all looked a bit sparse. There would be nothing much, we thought, to delay us. Three hours later we were still deeply absorbed.

We capture the castle

From Çavuştepe we headed east a further 35km to the village of Güzelsu and the fortress of Hoşap Kale, along the winding, rollercoaster road, labouring up hills, plunging into valleys. And it was as we crested a hill that we had our first view of the castle in the distance, on its own hilltop, surrounded by a beautiful valley with a stream running through.

There is not much to Güzelsu. We saw a cluster of grocery stores, a car-repair workshop, two cafés closed for Ramazan. Most of the men seemed to be gathered outside one of two mosques, but all eyes were on us.

As we crossed a bridge of striking black and white stone, two young boys came running out of a café by the stream that gave Hoşap and Güzelsu their names (both translate as Beautiful Water), and asked if we'd like to buy a glass of tea. So we sat down with our picnic, feeling that we could hardly have found a better spot for lunch.

From where we sat, Hoşap Kale looked quite impressive, but we did not have the full measure of how large and complex the entire site is. Compared with Van Kale and Çavuştepe, today's fortress is positively recent – built by the Ottoman Kurdish governor

Sarı Süleyman Bey in 1643 to resemble a Seljuk fortress. Parts near the cliff edge have started to crumble, but renovations to the entrance and main outer wall make it look surprisingly complete.

The walk around the outer walls is rewarding. Hoşap has a magnificent front gate but it was locked. Just as at Çavuştepe, the ticket booth was empty, but here we had no way to get in. We were passed on from one person to another, but no one had the keys. We were thwarted.

Still, we had not wasted our time. It had been worth the journey just for the sight of the village, the impressive views of the Kale from the road and from the bridge, tea and a picnic by the beautiful stream...

THE POWER OF THREE

Our next day trip was intensive. The castle of Örenkale, the Monastery of St Bartholomew and the wonders of Yavuzlar are far off the beaten track. We left at 6am to visit them all, and drove first to Başkale, along the D975, where we could return to refuel at a café.

Örenkale is only about 15km from Başkale, but we found ourselves on a dirt road scarcely fit for our compact car, let alone the dolmuş that serves the village. We had all but given up hope when we passed two men on horseback who assured us we were almost there.

We knew we had arrived when children swarmed around the car, excitedly guiding us through tracks and alleys to the medrese, a ruin of peculiar beauty, right at the village centre. The remnants of the castle itself stand high on a hill with no clear path by which to reach it, so we viewed it from below and marvelled at the feat of the builders who had sited it teetering on a cliff edge.

A visit to the Monastery of St Bartholomew involves another detour, northeast off the D975, following signs to Yavuzlar. Although a sacred Armenian site, the monastery was barred to tourists in 1990, used by the military, and then abandoned in 2013. It is still not officially on the tourist map, and the site still feels more military than holy, but the monastery itself is truly breathtaking. There was a gap in the barbed wire just wide enough to edge a car through to reach the hilltop, where abandoned houses, barracks and watchtowers were reminders of the difficult past in this part of Turkey. Yet there, on its pinnacle, sat St Bartholomew's, rising above it all in the silence. Its dome has collapsed, but its walls are intact, covered with pilgrims' crosses and graffiti, and with two enigmatic carved figures at the entrance. Inside, too, crosses have been carved into every inch.

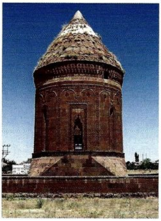
We could have spent hours here, but from this vantage we had a tantalising sight of Yavuzlar, and we had to set off while we could still be there in daylight.

The road winds for a further 15km through barren fields, and then suddenly there it is, "the Cappadocia of the east" – a weird, sculptural rockscape, hills like chimneys, like toadstools, like fairy-tale castles, with deep-dug caves.

The village of Yavuzlar is literally the end of the road. Beyond, there is just dirt track. And though the villagers are welcoming, the few hotels, that afternoon, were closed. It was time to make our way home.

TO THE ISLAND

Few Western tourists come to Van. At weekends there were plenty of Iranians, and in earlier seasons – we learnt from a new friend, the director at the tourist office – Russians would come for the beaches and to visit Akdamar Island. A number of resorts on the lake had been geared to catering for Russian tourists, but, with the economic difficulties back home, fewer made it these days, and most of the resorts had shut up shop.



Akdamar is the second largest of the four islands in Lake Van. Its great treasure is the 10th-century Armenian Apostolic Cathedral of the Holy Cross. This was one of the main attractions of Van for us. We understood why the Russians should want to see it. What surprised us was to hear from almost every Iranian we spoke to that they, too, planned a visit.

As ever, I wanted to cross to the island when the light was perfect, but so few tourists went there now, they had to wait to fill a boat to make the trip worthwhile. We could have hired a boat if we'd had a spare $100 – otherwise it would be just TL15 for each of us. So we deferred to the tourist office's suggestion that we wait for a weekend, when boats would be full of Iranian families.

On a July Saturday we duly made our way to the dolmuş stand, to be greeted by our Iranian friends. We paid our TL15 fares, were dropped at the dock – and there we had to wait around until more passengers showed up. It would have felt like a sorry waste of time if we hadn't had such good company, and we piled into the café for tea, fresh juices and the local speciality, amazing beef kebab.

With the arrival of a second dolmuş, again full of Iranians, we could finally be off. As we slipped away from the dock, free tea was brought out while songs in Turkish and Persian blared from loudspeakers. We'd have had to be real killjoys not to be caught up in such unaffected happiness.

The crossing takes around 35 minutes, and the island itself is well worth exploring, crisscrossed with paths that lead into the hills. Some families had brought beach towels and lunch and had come just to sit by the water and soak up the view, cooled by the breeze that comes off the lake. There was a nice café selling wonderful food, and ice creams – very welcome in scorching July. But we had come to see the church (it is to enter the site that you are asked to pay TL10 on leaving the boat), and in the absence of a regular timetable there was no knowing when the boat would be making the return trip; the horns would sound 30 minutes before it set off. We stayed most of the day.

The sheer wealth of craftsmanship on Akdamar has no equal in the Van region. There is as much intricate carving on the exterior of the church as there are impressive frescoes within it. Most striking is the blue patina that covers the paintings. It looks like an effect of nature, but was created by a wash of blue paint applied in 1915 to preserve the artwork beneath. It was meant to be washed off in a few years, but no one had returned to remove it and it remains to this day, sealing the frescoes to the walls.

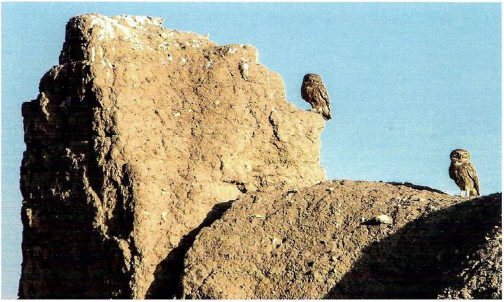
We made two pilgrimages to Akdamar, and on our second trip I was very struck that the sacred Christian site was populated that day by one American Christian, one Japanese Buddhist and a small crowd of Iranian Muslims.

THE LOVELY STONES

It is about five hours by refurbished road from Van to her sister city of Tatvan. The drive itself is a lovely one, hugging the lake for much of the way, with plenty of cafés if you feel like stopping for tea and a sandwich of very fresh fish. However, Tatvan itself is unlovely, with almost nothing to please the eye except its lake views. We found the Nemrut Crater closed to tourists, as it is, apparently, more often than not. But then this was to be no more than a stopover on our journey to explore the ancient Seljuk cemetery of Ahlat.

The Grand İskender Hotel stands on the lake shore in a faintly surreal situation, next to an abandoned amusement park. The ranks of expensive cars outside the hotel seemed like a promising sign. More encouraging still, stepping into the hotel foyer, we found lots of elegant people.

Once we'd checked in we went for dinner to one of Tatvan's many kebab houses, then had an early night, thinking we must be up at dawn to beat the queue for breakfast if we were to catch the



Above The owls of Van Kale
Opposite The Ulu Kümbet c1285, grandest of Ahlat's medieval Islamic tombs

best of the morning light in Ahlat.

When we woke and looked down from our window, all the Range Rovers and BMWs had gone; our Ford Focus stood alone in a great, empty expanse. Downstairs it was the same story. It turned out that the hotel had hosted a wedding the day before, but no guests had stayed over. Of 76 rooms, ours was the only one occupied.

The onward drive from Tatvan to Ahlat should take less than an hour, but there were so many distractions on the way. More than once we stopped to watch herdsmen driving their sheep and cattle down to drink, or simply to gaze at the dazzling waters.

In Ahlat, shoddy new apartment buildings rise up among the old traditional houses. No sign pointed the way to the city's precious historical site, but we soon began to spot tombs – the larger ones at first, then, suddenly, an entire other-worldly landscape of gravestones of all shapes and sizes. Once again we were on our own, surveying an open field of what looked from a distance like petrified plants, stretching as far as the eye could see, astonishing in the still-early light. An information board erected in 2014 tells the history of the site. For the past few years Turkey has been pushing to have Ahlat added to the Unesco World Heritage List. For now its status remains merely "tentative".

As part of the official effort, there has been major restoration and conservation work. We found ourselves wandering winding paths that have been laid to keep tourists away from the tombstones, where they might cause more damage.

We spent five hours walking around the cemetery, reading the inscriptions, admiring the patina and craftsmanship of the stones. Of hundreds upon hundreds, no two were quite alike. Each seemed to bear the fingerprint of the family it represented.

By the time we decided to take a break for lunch, we had been joined by no more than a dozen other visitors. We returned to our hotel feeling that one more night in Tatvan would be quite enough, while Ahlat would be with us for ever.

Seventh heaven

It is just 20km as the crow flies from the centre of Van to Yedi Kilise, the village of the Seven Churches, with its ruined Armenian monastery, founded a millennium ago, hidden in the hills above. Finding it is not so easy. You can make your way by dolmuş from the town centre, but that involves several changes and a lot of lost time. A local driver might whisk you there by car in 30 minutes, but we decided once more to hire our own, and it took much longer.

The roads are confusing, to say the least, and if you ask the way, as we had found before, you will usually end up where you started. I left Ai to research the route and direct us along unmarked roads. Maybe Google Maps have yet to get to grips with this part of the world. Maybe the locals are as bewildered as we were. Anyway, we made it somehow to Yedi Kilise, and it was well worth the detours.

You know you have reached the village when children swarm around your car to greet you, just for the excitement of seeing you. One young girl went so far as to insist we take a bite of her mother's freshly baked loaf.

We edged our way through this smiling welcoming committee to the 11th-century Church of the Mother of God, the only one of the eponymous "seven churches" (there may only have been five) to survive intact. It stands next to the mosque, which has the only café in the place.

Although it is a historic site, sponsored and protected by the Turkish government, its opening hours conform to no timetable. However, if you go into the mosque, someone there will certainly know someone who knows how to get hold of the custodian with his key. For TL10 he will unlock the gate and the wooden door in the carved stone portal to admit you to the church, where the interior is a small revelation. Apart from Akdamar, most monasteries around Van have fallen into woeful disrepair, yet the frescoes here should not be missed.

Despite its small size, the church held us in thrall for three hours – and more, as the gatekeeper kept offering tea.

Finds in high places

The remote ruined Monastery of St Thomas, on the southern shore of the lake, is not difficult to find, but you have to hold your nerve. We asked the locals in vain how to get there; either they could not explain, or they had never heard of it.

To visit it from Van, it is best to break your journey to or from Tatvan. Drive on the main road towards Gevaş and watch like a hawk for the sign to the village of Göründü. Once you reach Göründü, you simply follow the shoreline. The road gets smaller and rougher, but don't lose heart and turn back, as we almost did. Eventually you will come to a cove – and the end of the road. Look up to your right and there is St Thomas, high on the hill.

Here you have to leave the car and continue on foot – a real hike. It's about 45 minutes to the top, and for the last 15 it's hard going, steep and rocky. Don't go barelegged – you'll have to wade through the brush.

But none of this will matter, because with every step the monastery is closer, and so beautiful, as we saw it, at the end of day. The timing was not ideal for taking pictures, but we stood on the wall to admire the monument in the sunset against the backdrop of Lake Van as it faded away in the distance.

If you wish to witness the same spectacle, be sure to take a torch for the walk back. You'll probably have the place to yourself – so few people make the effort to get there – and it's something you'll never forget.

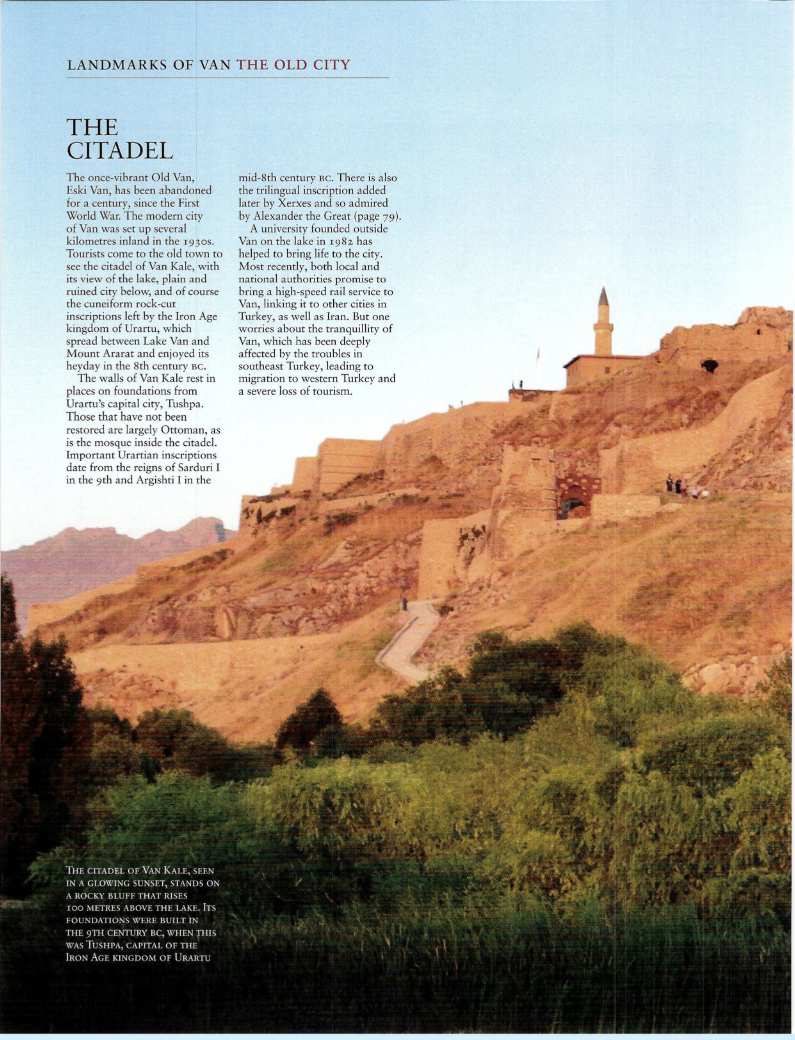
Brian McKee is a fine art photographer based in New York and Istanbul. For exhibitions, see brianmckeestudio.com

THE CITADEL

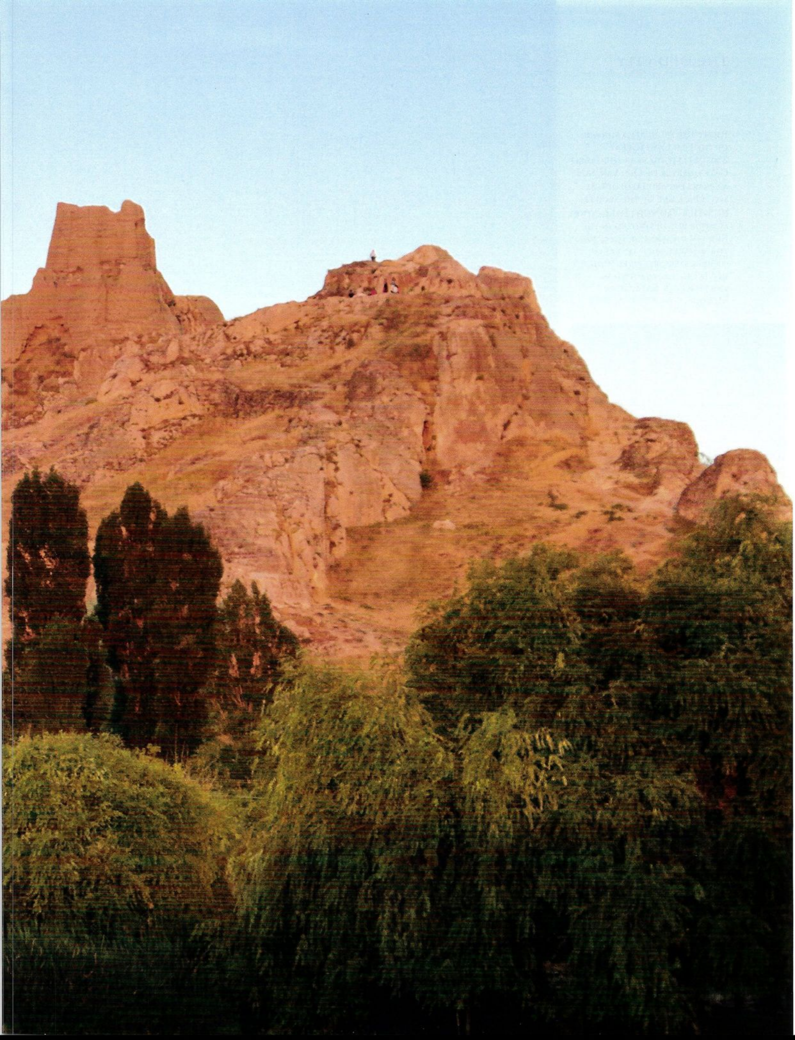
The once-vibrant Old Van, Eski Van, has been abandoned for a century, since the First World War. The modern city of Van was set up several kilometres inland in the 1930s. Tourists come to the old town to see the citadel of Van Kale, with its view of the lake, plain and ruined city below, and of course the cuneiform rock-cut inscriptions left by the Iron Age kingdom of Urartu, which spread between Lake Van and Mount Ararat and enjoyed its heyday in the 8th century BC.

The walls of Van Kale rest in places on foundations from Urartu's capital city, Tushpa. Those that have not been restored are largely Ottoman, as is the mosque inside the citadel. Important Urartian inscriptions date from the reigns of Sarduri I in the 9th and Argishti I in the mid-8th century BC. There is also the trilingual inscription added later by Xerxes and so admired by Alexander the Great (page 79).

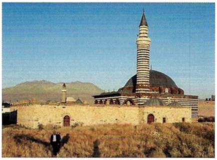
A university founded outside Van on the lake in 1982 has helped to bring life to the city. Most recently, both local and national authorities promise to bring a high-speed rail service to Van, linking it to other cities in Turkey, as well as Iran. But one worries about the tranquillity of Van, which has been deeply affected by the troubles in southeast Turkey, leading to migration to western Turkey and a severe loss of tourism.



THE CITADEL OF VAN KALE, SEEN IN A GLOWING SUNSET, STANDS ON A ROCKY BLUFF THAT RISES 100 METRES ABOVE THE LAKE. ITS FOUNDATIONS WERE BUILT IN THE 9TH CENTURY BC, WHEN THIS WAS TUSHPA, CAPITAL OF THE IRON AGE KINGDOM OF URARTU

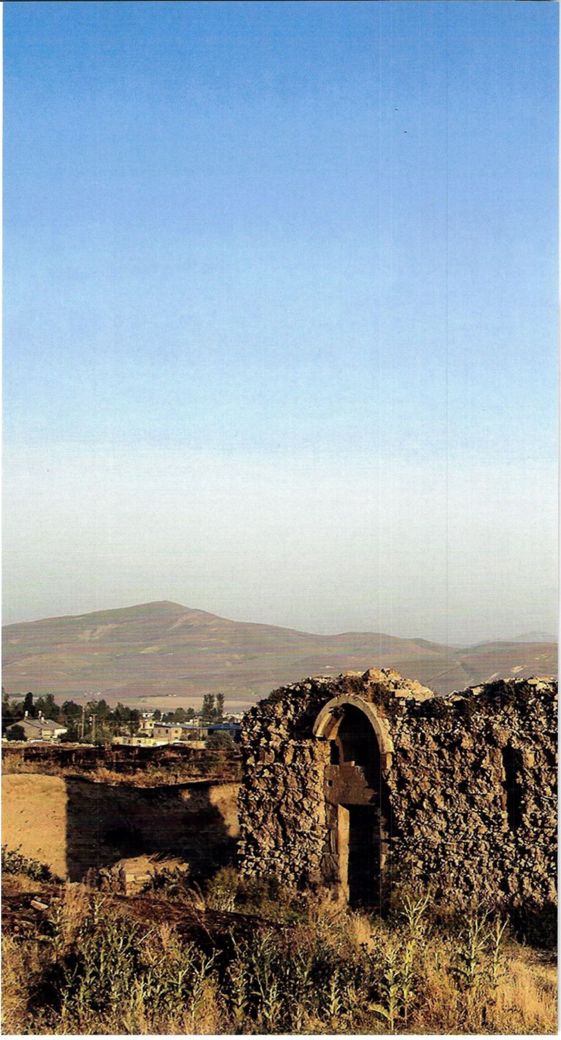


Right The truncated minaret of the Ulu Camî (Great Mosque) stood near the Tabriz Gate quarter of Old Van, now a sprawling archaeological site. Once one of the marvels of Seljuk Van, the 12th-century mosque was destroyed in the Russian invasion of 1915, when the minaret, with its bands of blue tiles, received a direct hit. In the background is the Ottoman Kaya Çelebî Mosque, completed in 1663



Above Urartian cuneiform inscriptions in the rock of the citadel of Van laud the exploits of Sarduri II (764–35 BC). He captured swathes of territory from the Assyrians and brought prosperity to his kingdom

Top The Köse Hüsrev Pasha Mosque was built in 1567 for the Ottoman governor. It was burnt down in the 1915 Russian invasion and the tiles lining the lower walls, some say, were carried off to the Hermitage. The mosque was excavated by Professor Abdüsselam Uluçam, now heading rescue work at the soon-to-be-flooded medieval city of Hasankeyf on the Tigris



EAST OF VAN

THE DRAMA OF A TREELESS LAND

Heading into the barren hinterland on the highway to Hakkari, the intrepid visitor can find rare wonders that span millennia – from Urartu's Iron Age canals to the awesome cliffs of Yavuzlar

Van's eastern hinterland is a treeless, sparsely populated landscape, where occasional encampments of nomadic herdsmen appear to make up most of the population, but persevere and you will find ancient remains and medieval piles and unexpected landscapes.

Following in Brian McKee's footsteps, it is a short dolmuş ride from Van to Çavuştepe, a Urartian citadel only now giving up its secrets nearly three millennia after it ruled over the fertile Gürpınar Plain, seen here, where traces of ancient Urartian canals are still visible.

Speeding east along the Hakkari highway, it is just 36km to the imposing fortress of Hoşap Kale. Beyond that, at the head of the Great Zap Valley, just 20km from the Iranian border, is Başkale, a town fought over by Romans and Parthians, Byzantines and Sassanids, and now famed for its herby cheese.

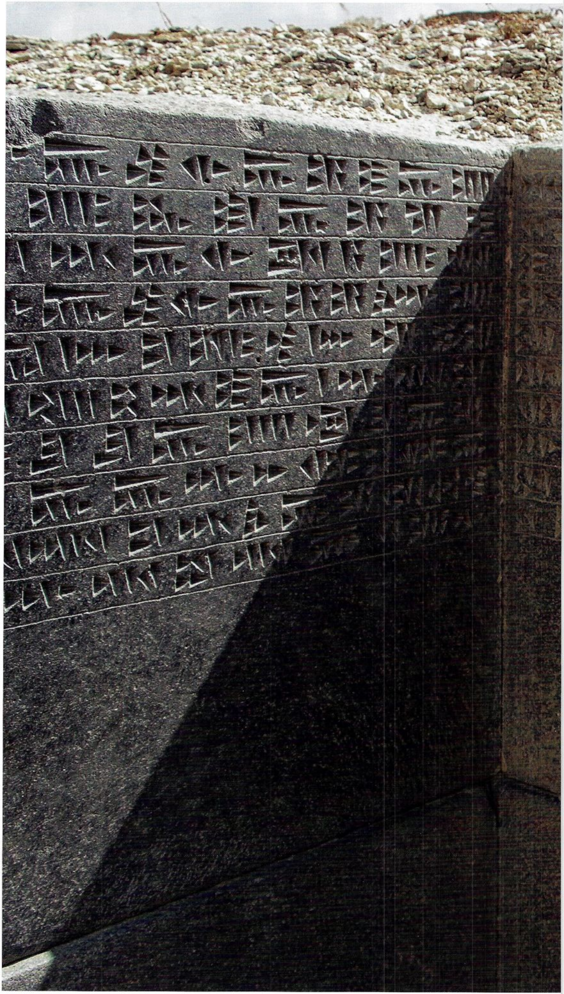
Climbing the eastern fringes of the Taurus Mountains to the south, you reach the village of Örenkale, old Pizan, with its medieval fortress and Ottoman medrese. Then, following the Great Zap river north takes you to the monolithic hilltop Monastery of St Bartholomew and eventually to the lunar landscape of Yavuzlar.

The smooth Hakkari highway belies wild country, with side roads leading off it that twist and turn back on themselves until you risk getting completely lost. It is also border country – Yüksekova (High Plateau), beyond Başkale, at the end of the road, is infamous for smuggling, an edgy place unaccustomed to innocent sightseers.

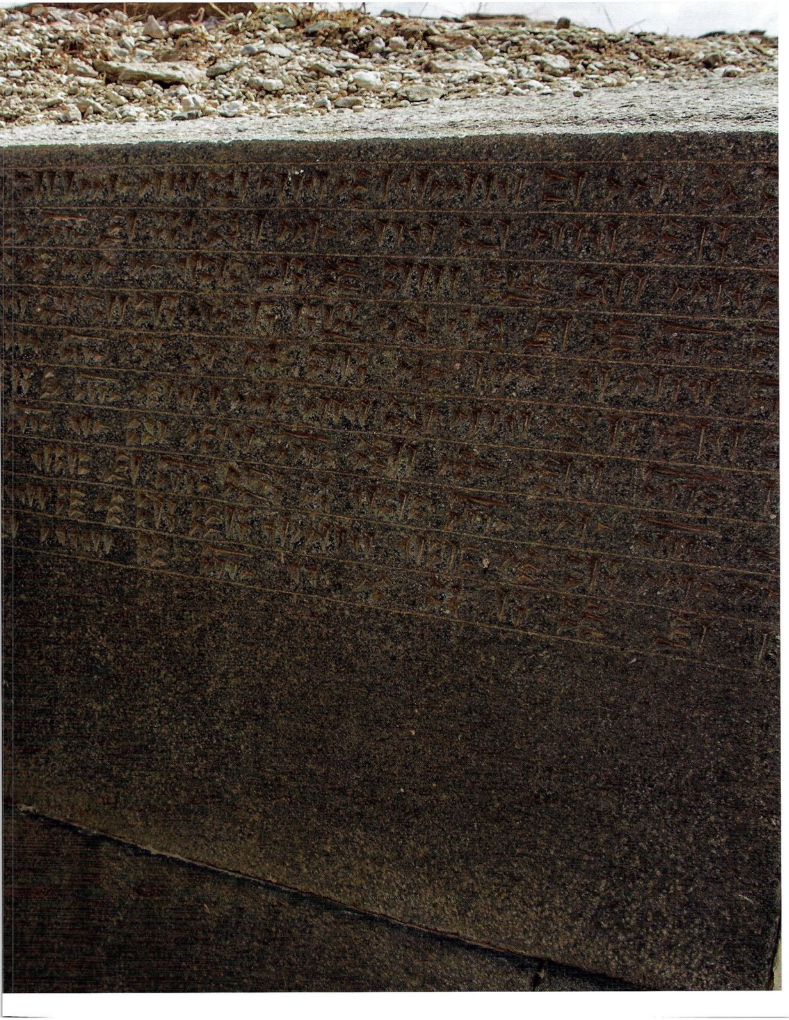
The Gürpinar Plain seen from the citadel of Çavuştepe (overleaf), founded by King Sarduri II, the canal-builder, in the 8th century BC and excavated from 1961 to 1975. An inscription there boasts that he 'found a desert and turned it into wheatfields and vineyards'. Another describes wine from the valley's vines being pressed in stone basins. The king's canals still irrigate the land and supply water to the city of Van 2,700 years later

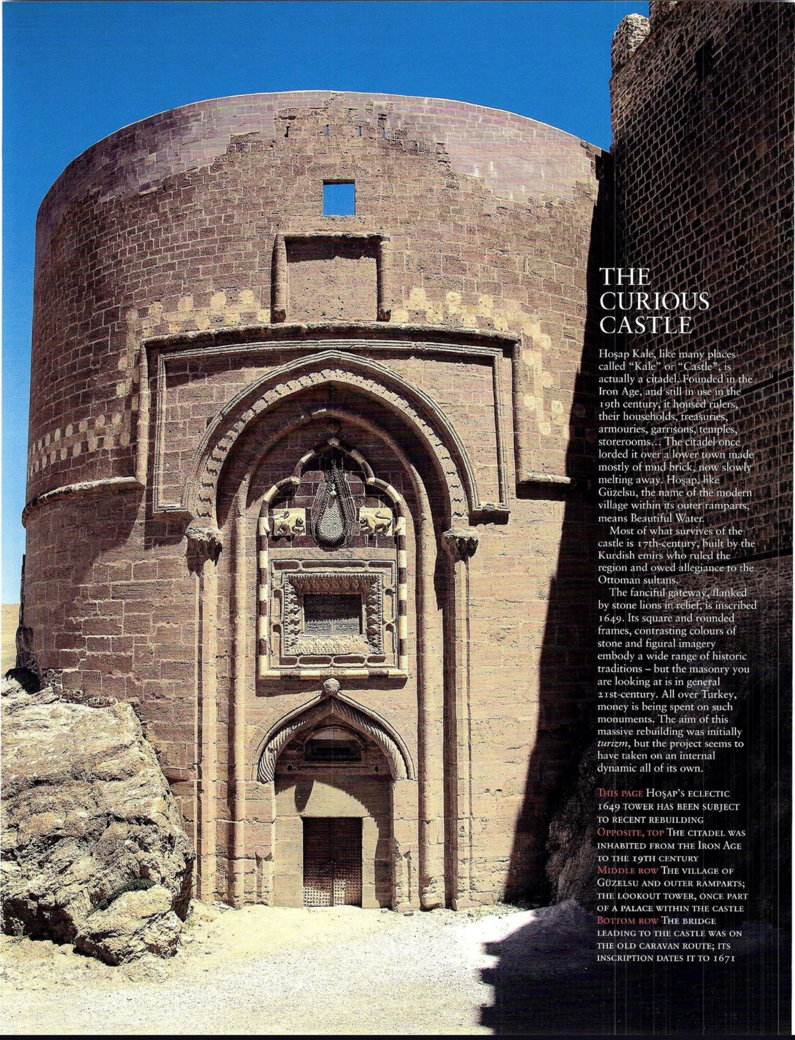
HISTORY SET IN STONE

Urartu's rule over Lake Van was a lengthy one. Its mountain peoples were first mentioned by the Assyrians in the 13th century BC (the name is linked with Mount Ararat). Their Iron Age kingdom had its heyday in the 8th century BC, when its history was carved in stone (right), and lasted until the 6th century BC. Very few people can now read Urartian: lucky visitors may find a custodian at the citadel who will translate.



Top The temple at Çavuştepe built by Sarduri II (764–735BC)
Centre Possibly the world's first flushing lavatory
Above In 2014, 120 giant jars were found buried up to their necks, enough to store 36 tons of grain, sesame oil and wine
Right Urartians kept minute records of daily life carved in cuneiform – here in granite





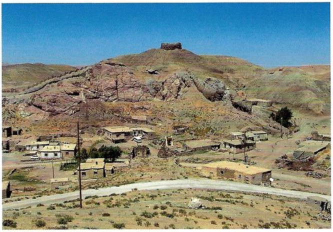
THE CURIOUS CASTLE

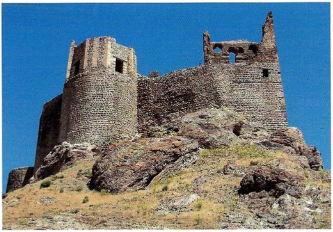
Hoşap Kale, like many places called "Kale" or "Castle", is actually a citadel. Founded in the Iron Age, and still in use in the 19th century, it housed rulers, their households, treasuries, armouries, garrisons, temples, storerooms… The citadel once lorded it over a lower town made mostly of mud brick, now slowly melting away. Hoşap, like Güzelsu, the name of the modern village within its outer ramparts, means Beautiful Water.

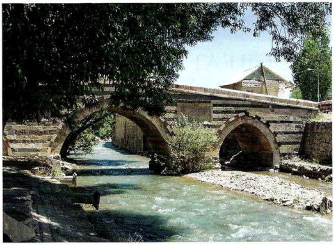
Most of what survives of the castle is 17th-century, built by the Kurdish emirs who ruled the region and owed allegiance to the Ottoman sultans.

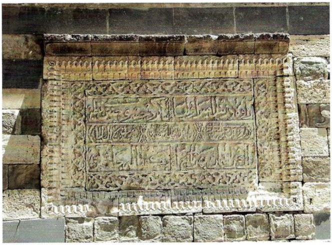
The fanciful gateway, flanked by stone lions in relief, is inscribed 1649. Its square and rounded frames, contrasting colours of stone and figural imagery embody a wide range of historic traditions – but the masonry you are looking at is in general 21st-century. All over Turkey, money is being spent on such monuments. The aim of this massive rebuilding was initially *turizm*, but the project seems to have taken on an internal dynamic all of its own.

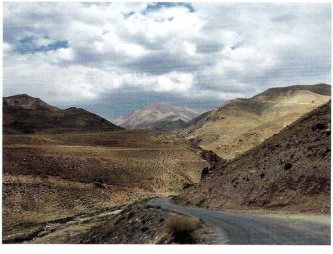
This page Hoşap's eclectic 1649 tower has been subject to recent rebuilding
Opposite, top The citadel was inhabited from the Iron Age to the 19th century
Middle row The village of Güzelsu and outer ramparts; the lookout tower, once part of a palace within the castle
Bottom row The bridge leading to the castle was on the old caravan route; its inscription dates it to 1671









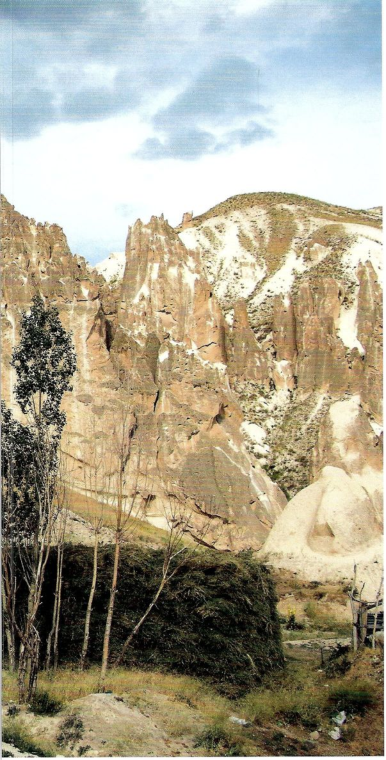


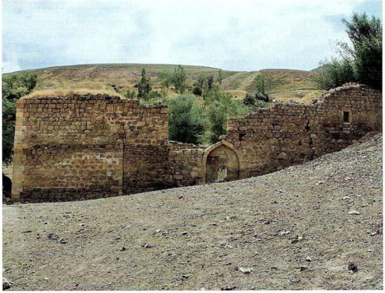
THE GREAT ZAP VALLEY

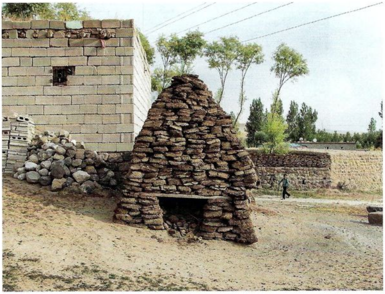
Little survives of old Başkale, 110km from Van. This Ottoman provincial capital, at the head of the Great Zap Valley, is just 20km from Iran, and has forever been a border town, fought over by Romans and Parthians, Sassanids and Byzantines, among others. Selim I captured it for the Ottomans at the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514, on his way to taking the Persian capital of Tabriz. In 1548 Süleyman the Magnificent finally secured it from the great Safavid Shah Tahmasp.

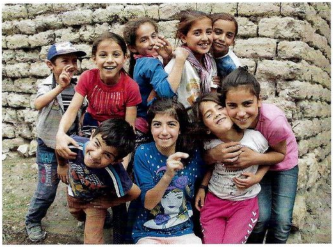
At 2,400m, Başkale is covered in snow 140 days of the year. Some 370,000 sheep and 26,000 goats keep the economy going (along with a little smuggling, no doubt). The local herby cheese, *otlu peynir*, is much in demand in Istanbul.

Visitors follow the broad









valley of the Great Zap north to Albayrak, where the Monastery of St Bartholomew stands on a hill that is often fortified, then to the village of Yavuzlar to admire the "fairy chimneys".

South of Başkale, the reward of a testing drive to Pizan (now Örenkale), high in the Taurus Mountains, is the easternmost Ottoman monument in Turkey: a 1653 medrese built by Hüsrev Pasha, brother of the bey of Hakkari, below a 12th-century castle that has seen better days.

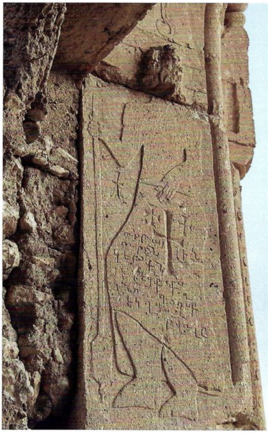
MAIN PICTURE THE VOLCANIC ROCK FORMATIONS OF YAVUZLAR ARE A MATCH FOR CAPPADOCIA'S
FAR LEFT THE ROAD TO THE VILLAGE OF ÖRENKALE IN THE EASTERN TAURUS MOUNTAINS
LEFT THE VILLAGE WELCOMING COMMITTEE SHOWS THE WAY
TOP THE 17TH-CENTURY HÜSREV PASHA MEDRESE AT ÖRENKALE
ABOVE DRIED ANIMAL DUNG FOR FUEL IS STORED IN MANY FANCIFUL WAYS IN YAVUZLAR

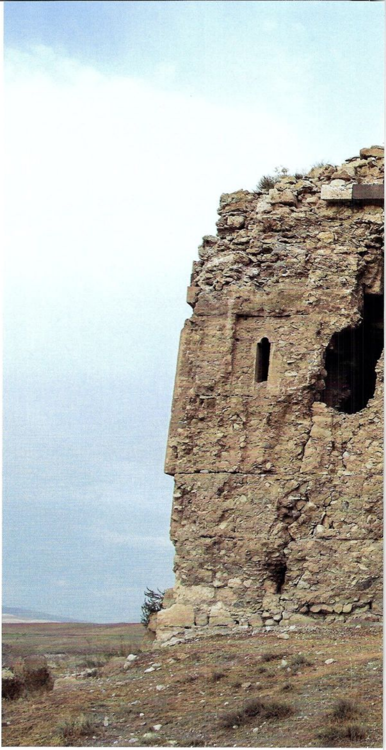
ST BARTHOLOMEW THE HEALER

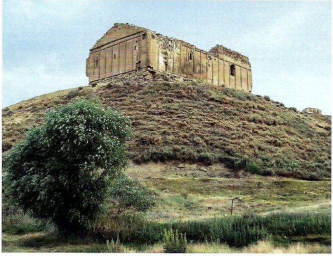
According to a tradition that was recorded as early as the 8th century, St Bartholomew, the Apostle of Healing, was martyred at the site of Albayrak, near the town of Başkale in the valley of the Great Zap.

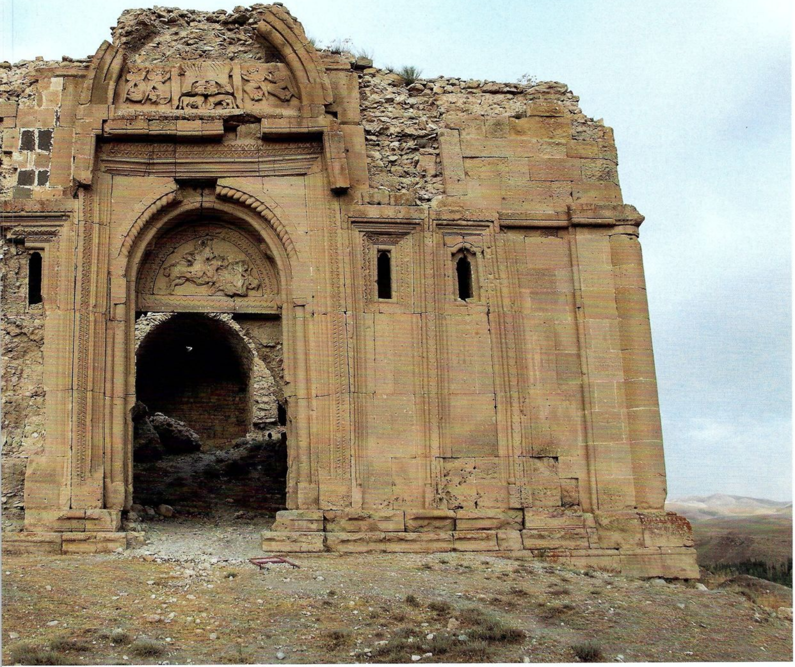
The monastery church commemorating the Apostle is much later in date, however, perhaps from the 13th century, and heavily restored in the 19th.

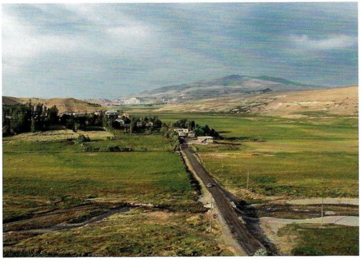
Bartholomew is believed to have brought Christianity to the Armenians after converting King Zanatruk's sister. Among his many miracles he is credited with curing the king's general of leprosy. The Apostle's bones, once kept in the north sacristy, drew throngs of pilgrims well into the last century.











Top left The sculptures of St Bartholomew's remain a puzzle. Though covered with pilgrims' crosses and graffiti, the low-relief figures by the entrance appear to be neither saints nor holy men. The art historian Jean-Michel Thierry thought they might be architects holding plumb bobs

Bottom row, from left Looking like a fortress from a distance, the church includes a large zamatun and sacristies in one monumental block. Carved crosses throughout attest to its historic popularity as a pilgrimage site. From here you look across the valley to Iran

Above Severely damaged in the earthquake of 1966, portions of the facing stone and sculptures have fallen. The curious relief above the entrance was thought by locals in the last century to show Bartholomew slaying a dragon – an event not known from the Apostle's life

AROUND LAKE VAN

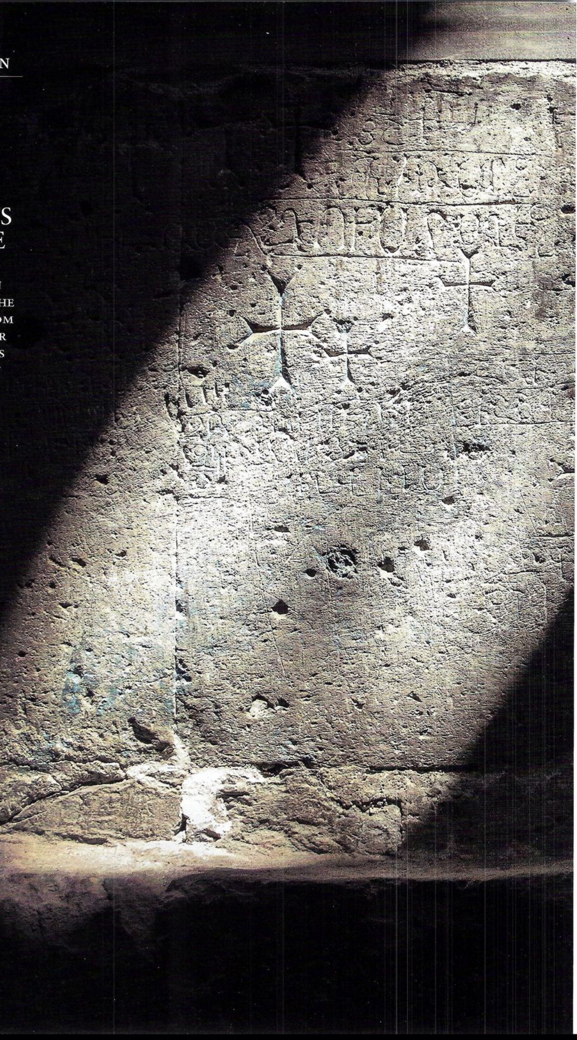
AKDAMAR AND THE MONUMENTS OF THE LAKE

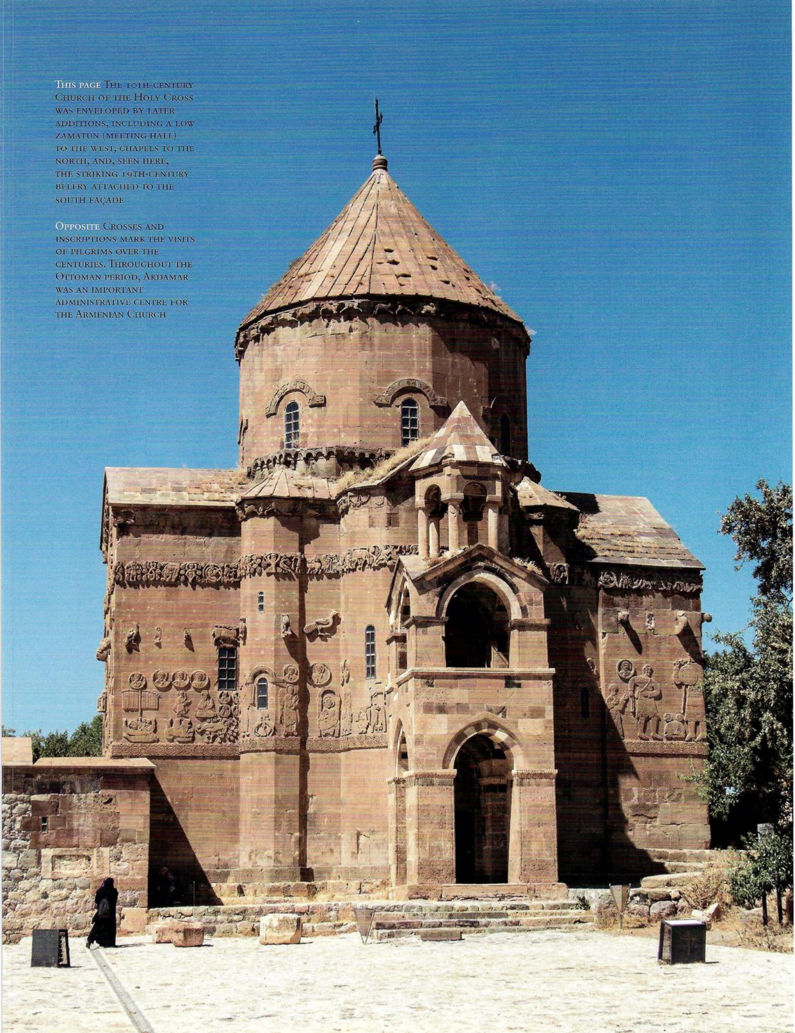
For the finest sacred monuments, Christian and Islamic, follow the shore of the lake, from the island of Akdamar to the haunting tombs of Ahlat. Then return to the heights for two monasteries with colourful stories

From Van's eastern hinterland, the fine art photographer Brian McKee returned to the lake and headed west along the southern shore.

Lake Van has a rich legacy of grand medieval monuments in remote, dramatic settings. Ahlat, on the windswept western shore, has a forest of haunting headstones carved with poignant stories. High in the hills overlooking the lake, to the east and south, the Monasteries of Yedi Kilise and St Thomas are places of legend, miracles and holy relics.

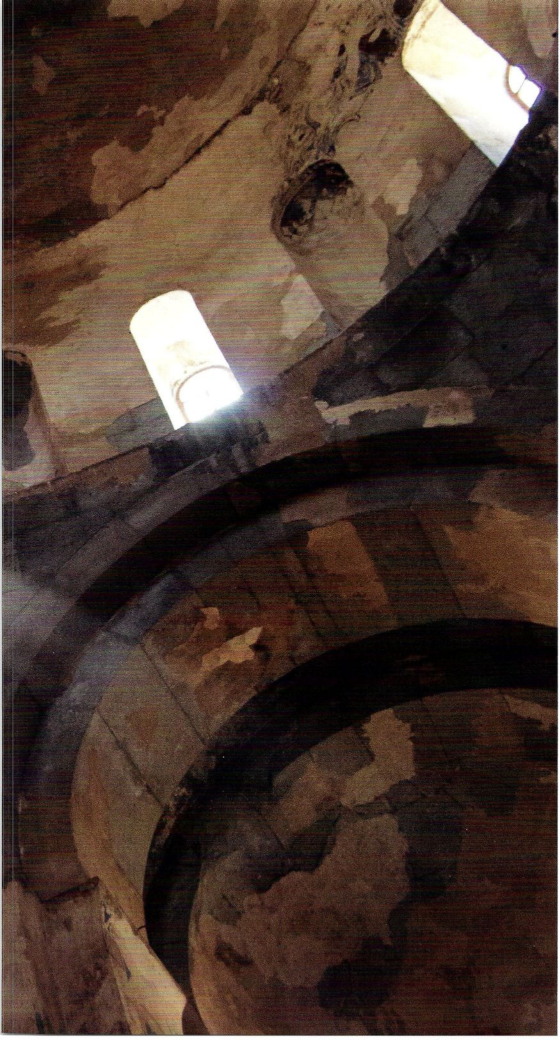
Most romantic and accessible of the places to visit is the small island of Akdamar, a short boat ride across clear blue water from the south shore. Its 10th-century Church of the Holy Cross, sporadically thronged with cheerful Iranian visitors, has carvings of biblical scenes on its façades as important and fascinating as the frescoes within.





This page The 10th-century Church of the Holy Cross was enveloped by later additions, including a low zamatun (meeting hall) to the west, chapels to the north, and, seen here, the striking 19th-century belfry attached to the south façade

Opposite Crosses and inscriptions mark the visits of pilgrims over the centuries. Throughout the Ottoman period, Akdamar was an important administrative centre for the Armenian Church

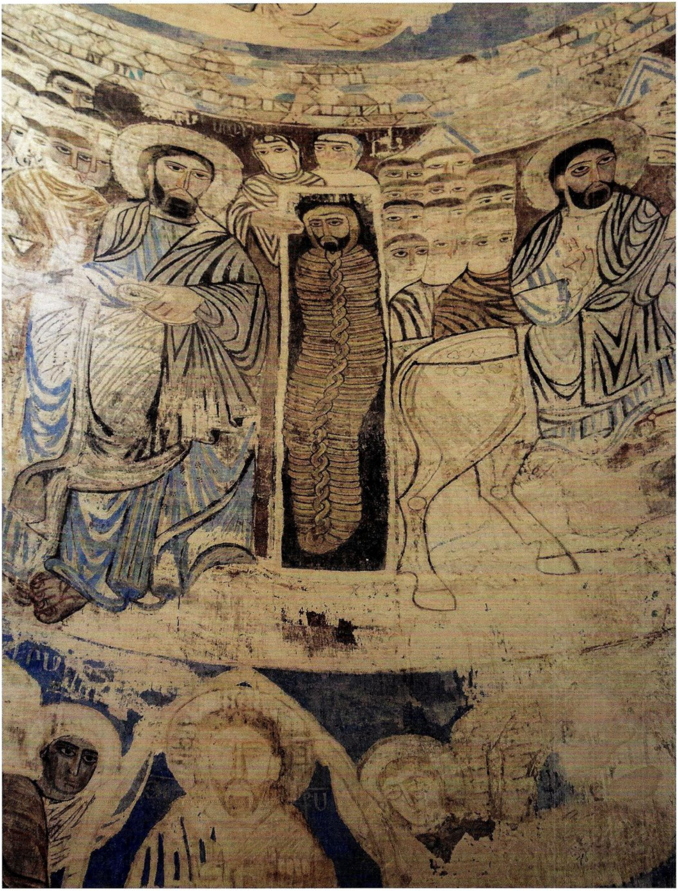


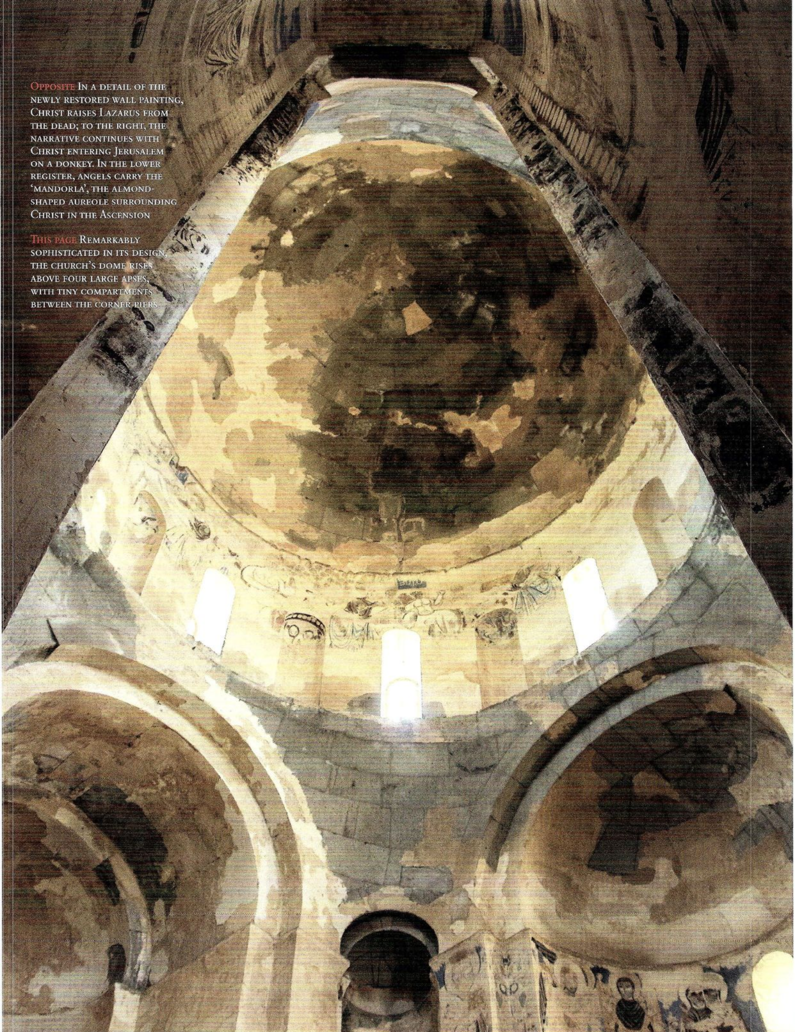
The most famous and best-preserved of the medieval monuments at Lake Van, the Church of the Holy Cross on the island of Akdamar was constructed in 915–21 as the palace chapel for Gagik I Artsruni, ruler of the Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan. Distinctive because of the richness of its exterior sculpture, the church also preserves significant portions of its wall painting, recently conserved.

Vaspurakan, the Armenian "Land of Princes", comprising the territories around Lake Van, was a going concern in the high Middle Ages: a briefly independent kingdom, strategically situated between the Byzantine Empire to the west and Abbasid Caliphate to the east. It owed its independent existence to careful political negotiations rather than military strength: recognised by the Caliph in 908 (unlike the Bagratid kingdom to the north, centred on Ani), its lands were ultimately ceded to the Byzantines in 1021. The prosperous reign of Gagik I Artsruni (908–43) and his successors was a golden age for the region, as witnessed by the the surviving monuments and subsequent legends.

ABOVE THE VAULTED ADDITION TO THE WEST OF THE CHURCH – KNOWN AS A ZAMATUN AND BUILT CENTURIES LATER – IS TYPICAL OF LATER ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE, SERVING AS ENTRY VESTIBULE, MEETING HALL AND MAUSOLEUM. THIS ZAMATUN IS AS LARGE AS THE CHURCH ITSELF BUT KEPT LOW AND SIMPLE SO AS NOT TO COMPETE WITH THE RICH ORNAMENTATION OF THE FAÇADES

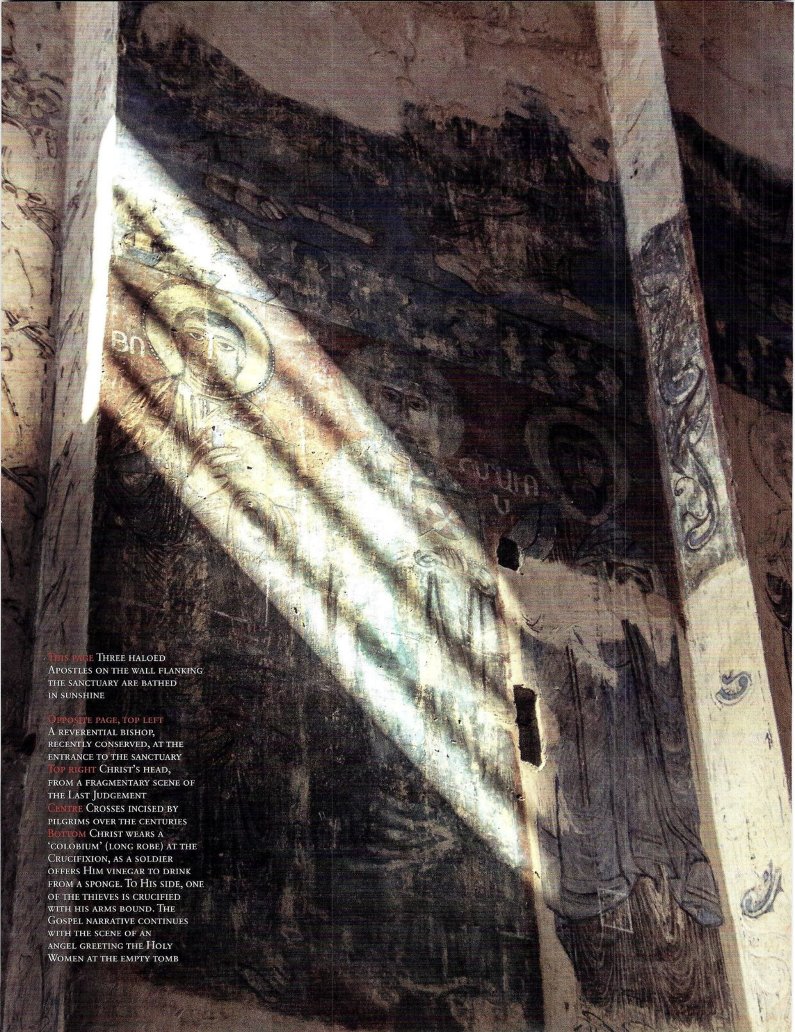
LEFT LIGHT STREAMS INTO THE CHURCH THROUGH A WINDOW IN THE TALL DOME. TRACES OF MURAL BELOW THE ARCHES SHOW FIGURES SET AGAINST A RICH BACKGROUND OF LAPIS LAZULI





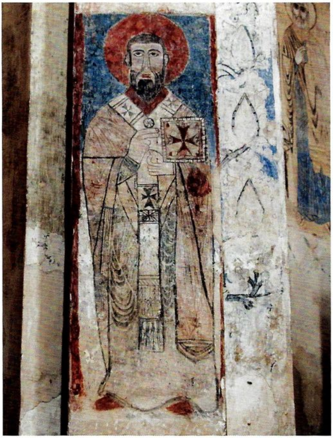
Opposite In a detail of the newly restored wall painting, Christ raises Lazarus from the dead; to the right, the narrative continues with Christ entering Jerusalem on a donkey. In the lower register, angels carry the 'mandorla', the almond-shaped aureole surrounding Christ in the Ascension

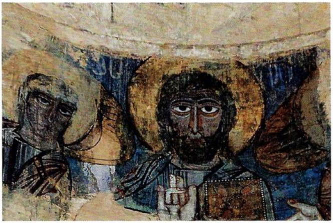
This page Remarkably sophisticated in its design, the church's dome rises above four large apses, with tiny compartments between the corner piers

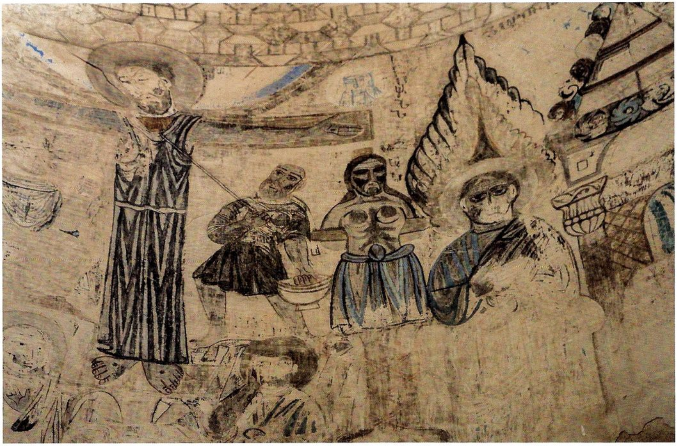


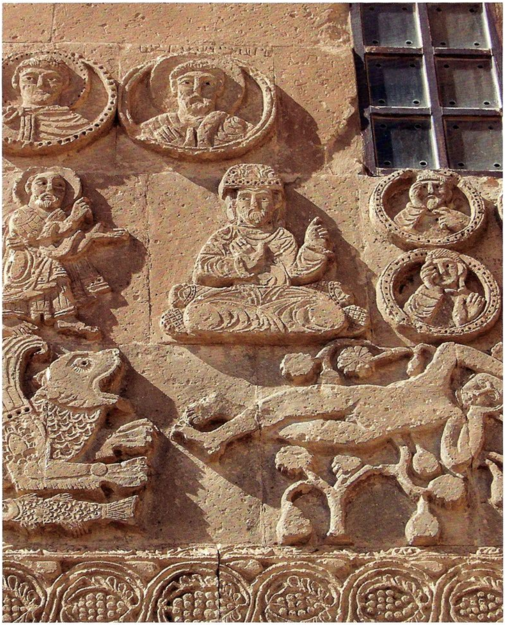
This page Three haloed Apostles on the wall flanking the sanctuary are bathed in sunshine

Opposite page, top left A reverential bishop, recently conserved, at the entrance to the sanctuary
Top right Christ's head, from a fragmentary scene of the Last Judgement
Centre Crosses incised by pilgrims over the centuries
Bottom Christ wears a 'colobium' (long robe) at the Crucifixion, as a soldier offers Him vinegar to drink from a sponge. To His side, one of the thieves is crucified with his arms bound. The Gospel narrative continues with the scene of an angel greeting the Holy Women at the empty tomb









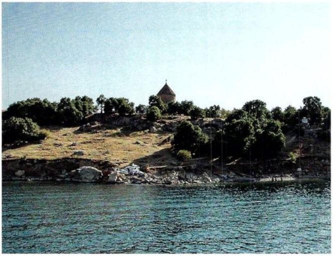
Stories on the walls
The faceted walls of the Church of the Holy Cross are decorated with sculpted bands of vegetal ornament, busts of Old Testament prophets, and standing figures of saints and biblical characters

Left Two prophets appear in roundels above an elaborated narrative of the story of Jonah, in which a mythical Persian beast, the 'senmurv' (lower left), replaces the traditional whale. To its right, Jonah, disgorged, sleeps beneath a gourd vine. Above, as the narrative continues, Jonah warns the king of Nineveh of the destruction of his city, while, in the roundels next to the king, the citizens of Nineveh express their dismay

Opposite Representing the protection from evil offered to the faithful, St Theodore slays a dragon

Below left Now open as a museum, the church continues to attract both tourists, mainly Iranian, and Armenian pilgrims

Below right Arriving at the island by boat, the visitor sees the conical roof of the church from afar



THE ELOQUENT STONES OF AHLAT

In the 13th century Ahlat was a vibrant cosmopolitan city famed for its architects and artisans. All roads led there – from Baghdad, Tabriz, Samarkand. But time and tide have wreaked destruction. Little remains except hundreds of haunting monuments to the dead

Like its companion cities around Lake Van, Ahlat, on the western shore, was once a thriving cosmopolitan city; indeed, in medieval times, perhaps the largest in the region. The capital of a minor Turkic dynasty – the Shah-i Armin, also known as the Sökmenoğulları – Ahlat thrived thanks to its position on caravan routes and the export of salted dried fish.

Its architects were famous far and wide, their works in other cities, such as the Great Mosque of Divriği (Cornucopia 43), surviving as testimony to their great skill and inventiveness. In Ahlat itself, harsh winters, war and earthquakes have taken their toll, and precious little remains of its medieval wealth other than a haunting 12th-to-15th-century Islamic cemetery – the most eloquent evidence of Ahlat's erstwhile glory.

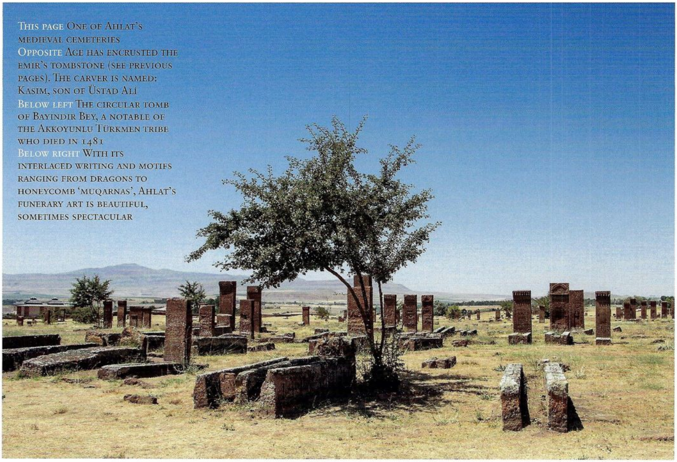
For years the art historian Abdüsselam Uluçam, then at Van's Yüzüncü Yıl University, waged a battle with the rising lake waters, uprooting many of the tombs and headstones to re-erect them on higher ground.

The tombstones have also captivated two generations of a family of scholars. Professor Beyhan Karamağaralı worked with her husband Haluk at the site, bringing the stones to public attention in 1972 with her book *Ahlat Mezartaşları* (Ahlat Tombstones), reissued by the Ministry of Culture in 1992. And in recent years their daughter Nakış Karamağaralı, herself an art historian, has worked at the very site where once she played as a small child.

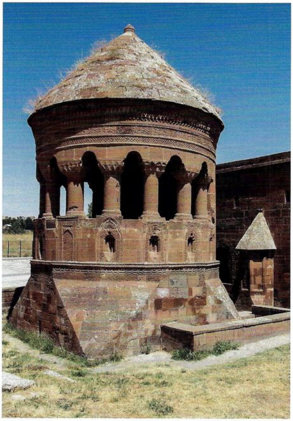
Her mother's book in turn allows us to trace the stones' history through generations of Ahlat's residents – both the artists who created them in the Middle Ages, many of whom are named, and the notable men and women they commemorate.

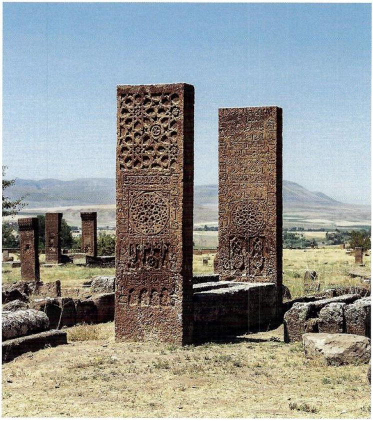
There is an intimacy to some of these inscriptions that belies their exposed setting on the shore of Lake Van: nicknames are often given, and every once in a while a Persian poem is full of grief for the beauty of a man cut down in the flower of youth.

The tomb of Husam üd-Devlet ve'd-Din Birmiş, who died in July 1412. He came from a distinguished family of emirs originally from eastern Iran (see detail overleaf). Scholars had the wooden steps and pathways installed to protect the site from careless tourists



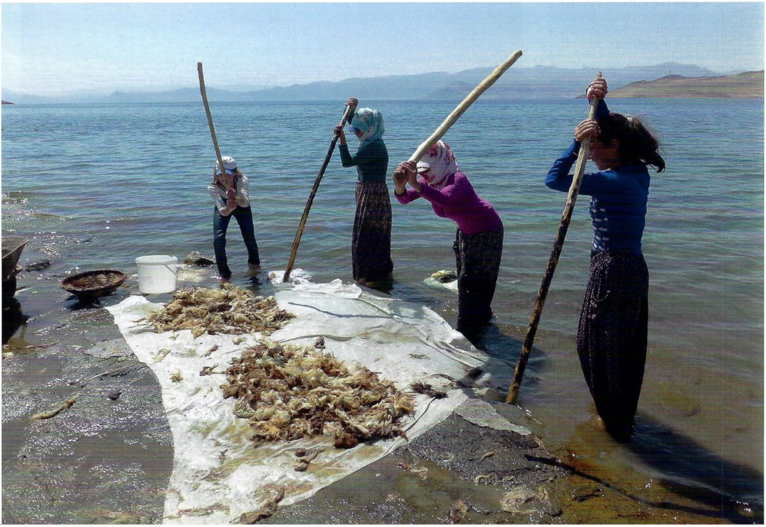
This page One of Ahlat's medieval cemeteries
Opposite Age has encrusted the emir's tombstone (see previous pages). The carver is named: Kasim, son of Üstad Ali
Below left The circular tomb of Bayındır Bey, a notable of the Akkoyunlu Türkmen tribe who died in 1481
Below right With its interlaced writing and motifs ranging from dragons to honeycomb 'muqarnas', Ahlat's funerary art is beautiful, sometimes spectacular





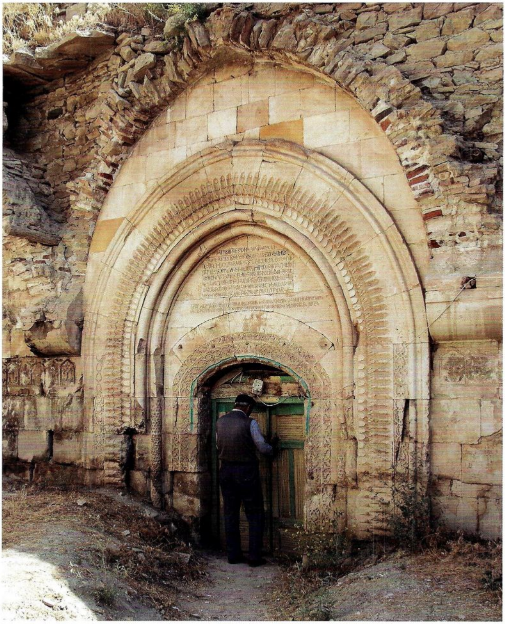
Above A bicycle made for two below the fortress of Van Kale Below A golden fleece: sheep-shearing at Ahlat

Above Washday in the City of Seven Churches Below Beating wool at Ahlat to bleach it and remove the lanolin – Van is a saline soda lake



YEDİ KİLİSE: LAST OF THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

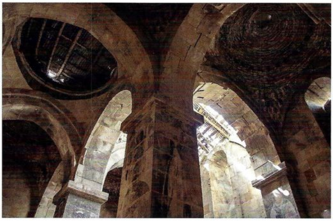
FOUNDED BY A MEDIEVAL KING AND QUEEN, A CLUSTER OF CHURCHES CLOSE TO VAN GREW UP AROUND A FRAGMENT OF THE TRUE CROSS, ATTENDED BY VISIONS, LEGENDS AND DISASTERS. THE ONE SURVIVOR HINTS AT PAST SPLENDOUR



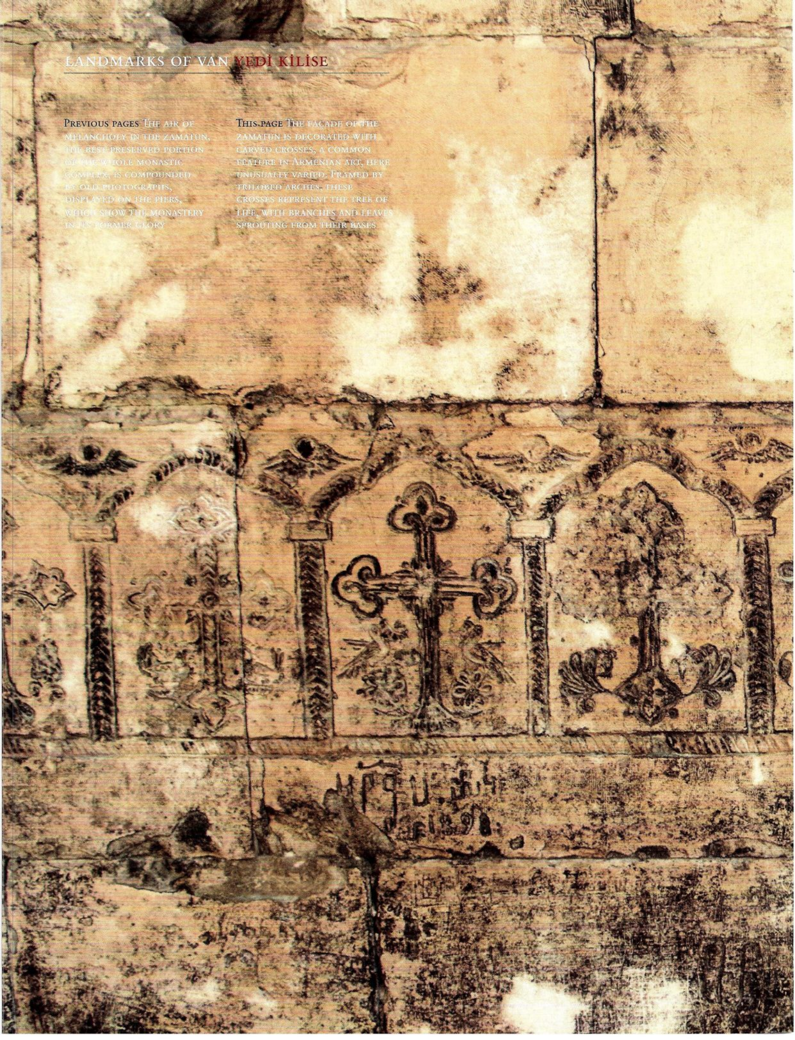
One of the richest ecclesiastical establishments in the kingdom of Vaspurakan, the Monastery of Yedi Kilise (which means Seven Churches, although there were probably only five) was founded to keep a fragment of the True Cross. Allegedly deposited there in the late 3rd century by Gayane and Hripsime, two holy women on pilgrimage, the relic vanished when they left. Four centuries later, it miraculously reappeared, thanks to the fervent prayers of a hermit named Thodik and his disciple Yovel, whose piety was rewarded with a vision of the resplendent cross descending from the heavens to the altar of their humble hermitage. Following the reconquest of Vaspurakan from the Arabs, King Gagik I Artsruni had a new container made for the relic.

Khoshush, wife of the future King Senekerim-Hovhannes, built the first church here on the slope of Mount Varag (Erek Dağı), 15km from Van, in 981. The monastery of Yedi Kilise, correctly known as Varagavank, was founded by Senekerim once he came to the throne in 1003. It slowly expanded into an irregular cluster of ecclesiastical buildings, of which the only real survivor is the Church of the Mother of God, attributed to Senekerim himself.

Damaged and rebuilt over the centuries, Yedi Kilise was ravaged by the Mongols in 1318, by the Persians in 1534, by earthquake in 1648, by fire in 1915, and again by earthquake in 2011.



ABOVE THE CUSTODIAN OPENS THE DOOR OF THE ZAMATUN AT THE ENTRANCE TO YEDİ KİLİSE'S CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD. THE PORTICO IN FRONT OF IT FELL IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 2011
LEFT THE SPACIOUS ZAMATUN WAS ADDED IN THE 17TH CENTURY
OPPOSITE SUN SHINES THROUGH THE ROUGH LATTICE WHERE ONCE A DOME ROSE OVER THE 11TH-CENTURY NAVE. BUILT ON A QUATREFOIL PLAN, LIKE THAT OF AKDAMAR, THE CHURCH HAS TINY CIRCULAR COMPARTMENTS SET BETWEEN THE CORNER PIERS



Previous pages The air of melancholy in the zamatun, the best-preserved portion of the whole monastic complex, is compounded by old photographs, displayed on the piers, which show the monastery in its former glory

This page The façade of the zamatun is decorated with carved crosses, a common feature in Armenian art, here unusually varied. Framed by trilobed arches, these crosses represent the tree of life, with branches and leaves sprouting from their bases

ST THOMAS, NO DOUBT

First mentioned in the 15th century, the monastery church of St Thomas near Altınsaç, above the lake's southern shore, has a rich, if legendary, history. It was once known to the locals as Mezir, perhaps from the Turkish *mezar* (tomb), for the church is said to have been built to shelter the relics of the Apostle Thomas.

According to a 13th-century Armenian tradition, the mortal remains of Thomas were brought from India, where he preached the Gospel, to Edessa (Urfa) by his disciple Xanthikos. During the Persian incursions, his bones were dispersed by a certain Yusuf, who, as a result, was afflicted with horrifying visions. Later touched by grace, Yusuf gathered the bones in an ornate reliquary, and, guided by a light from heaven, carried them to Lake Van, entrusting them to a small monastery.

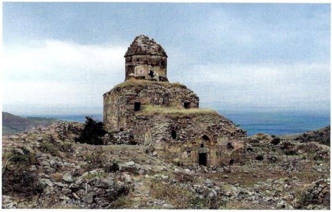
After six years, Yusuf was divinely guided to take the relics to a site called Parcis (probably Altınsaç), where a hermit guarded them. The monastery was probably built in the 11th century at the behest of the ruling Artsruni dynasty, and the relics were installed in a marble tomb in the vestibule of its church.

READING ON LAKE VAN

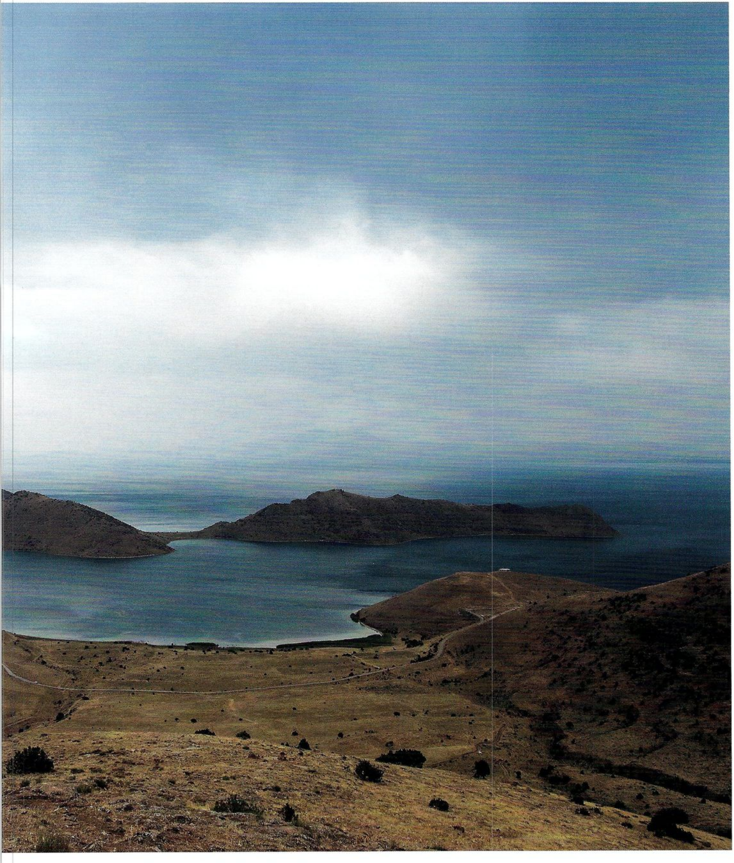
- *'Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey' (4 vols) by TA Sinclair, £225 per volume; Kindle edition £60 per volume.*
- *'Eastern Turkey', updated chapter of 'Blue Guide' (Kindle).*
- *For the prehistoric, Bronze and Iron Ages: 'Çavuştepe' (TTK, 1988), by Afif Erzen, who excavated the site; 'The Heritage of Eastern Turkey', by AG Sagona (Macmillan); 'The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Anatolia'*
- *See cornucopia.net/guide for further reading and travel notes*

IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES

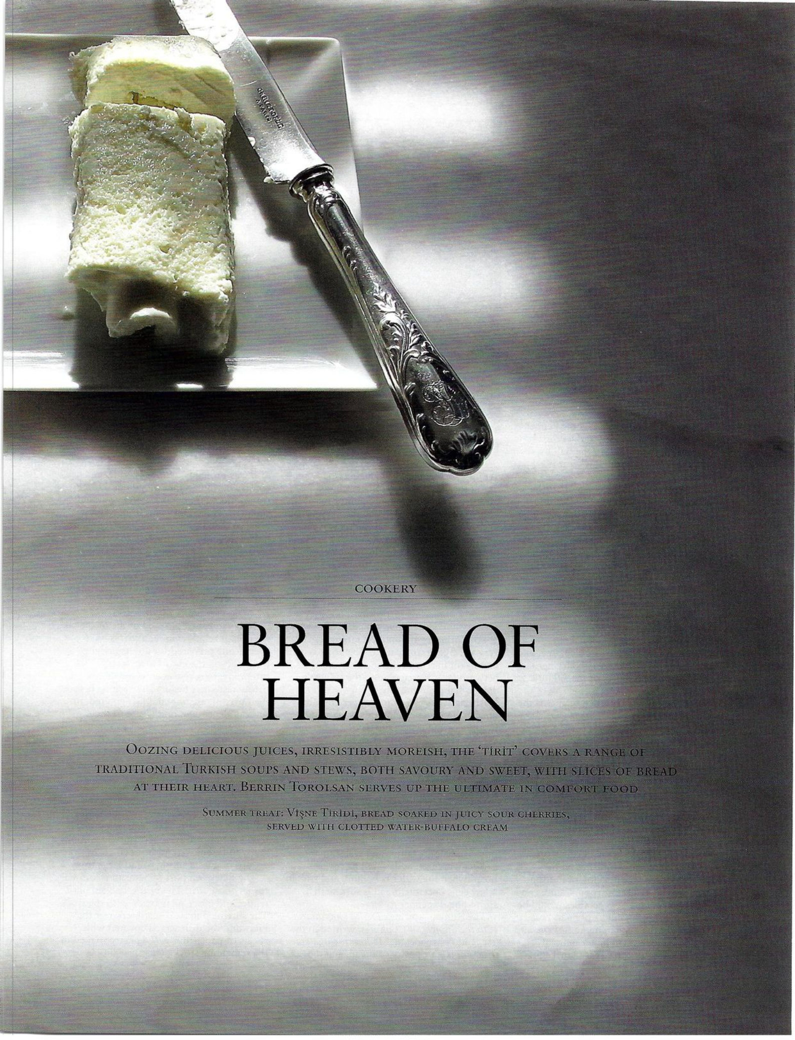
Brian McKee continues his tour of Turkey's eastern landmarks: the Ishak Pasha Palace, the city of Erzurum and the ruins of Ani



THIS PICTURE A DRAMATIC VIEW OF THE LAKE FROM THE CHURCH OF ST THOMAS
TOP LEFT THE CHURCH IN THE DYING LIGHT OF THE DAY, WITH THE LAKE IN THE DISTANCE. IT MAY DATE FROM THE 11TH CENTURY, ALTHOUGH THE TALL DOME IS PROBABLY THE RESULT OF A 16TH-CENTURY RESTORATION. THE LARGE ZAMATUN AT THE FRONT WAS ADDED IN THE 17TH OR 18TH CENTURY
BELOW LEFT GOATS, SEEN HERE AT YEDİ KİLİSE, ARE AS UBIQUITOUS IN VAN AS THE FAMOUS SWIMMING VAN CATS ARE RARE



PHOTOGRAPHS: BERRIN TOROLSAN



COOKERY

BREAD OF HEAVEN

Oozing delicious juices, irresistibly moreish, the 'tirit' covers a range of traditional Turkish soups and stews, both savoury and sweet, with slices of bread at their heart. Berrin Torolsan serves up the ultimate in comfort food

Summer treat: Vişne Tiridi, bread soaked in juicy sour cherries, served with clotted water-buffalo cream

Robert May was the son of a distinguished chef in a large English country house, sent off to Paris at the age of ten to train for five years as a chef by the mistress of the house. In 1660, aged 72, he published *The Accomplisht Cook or the Art and Mystery of Cooking*, the first important cookery book in England. It is still in print, its English recipes laced with cosmopolitan dishes, French, Italian, Spanish, some extravagant, others "for the general good", so everyone may give "a handsome and relishing entertainment in all seasons of the year".

"A Turkish Dish of Meat", one of May's first recipes in the chapter on beef, is a classic *tirit* dish – *tirit*, which translates as "sop" or "sippet", being slices or pieces of bread intended to absorb the juices of a soup or stew usually made with meat. "Take an interlarded piece of beef, cut it into thin slices," May instructs, "and put it into a pot that hath a close cover, or stewing-pan… a quantity of whole pepper, two or three whole onions, and let this boil very well, then take out the onions, and dish it on sippets, the thicker it is the better."

Who knows how this elementary dish found its way into May's book? But it is correctly described and to this day it can be found on the tables of most families in Turkey, where it is commonly known as *ekmek aşı* ("dish of bread"), *papara* or, more widely, just *tirit* (borrowed from the Arabic *tharid*). Bread is the main ingredient, and it is the best way of turning stale or leftover bread into a filling dish. Its origins are probably very ancient and it was popular among the Arab conquerors of the Middle Ages. *Tirit* has preserved its popularity, along with its Arabic name, and become part of a collective culinary heritage stretching from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific.

One of the earliest recorded recipes is the delicious-sounding *tharida shamiyya* – lamb, chicken or any other fowl, cooked with mushrooms, vegetables and spices and piled on chunks of bread previously soaked in broth. It appears in the 10th-century Arabic cookery book *Kitab al-Tabīkh* (*The Book of Dishes*) compiled by al-Warraq. Three centuries later, the Andalusian al-Tujibi recommends a *tirit* of pigeon stew cooked with summer herbs in his book *Fadalat al-Khiwan* (*Delicacies of the Table*).

RAMAZAN KEBABI – MINCE AND PİDE (PITTA BREAD), SERVED WITH GARLIC YOGHURT

Meanwhile, the Mongolian rulers of China feasted on similar dishes on the Asian steppes. A "good soup" of mutton trotters, sheep's tail, mushrooms, spices and various root and green vegetables would be prepared with thick chunks of naan bread. The dish bore the Persian name *ishkene* and is listed in a medieval culinary manual written in 1330 for the Great Qan Tugh Temür, a descendant of Genghis Khan.

Another fascinating culinary guide, presented to the Ottoman Sultan Murad II, father of the future Mehmed the Conqueror, in the first half of the 15th century, is a Turkish edition of al-Baghdadi's 1226 *Book of Dishes*, translated by the great savant and courtier Mahmûd Şirvanî, who added recipes with personal observations. Being a doctor, he included information on hygiene and the beneficial qualities of the dishes. Şirvanî's numerous *tirit* recipes, both savoury and sweet, give a picture of menus at both princely and modest tables across a very wide geographic area. The book is an important mirror of the social layers between the sovereign's and the subject's dietary habits of the day.

Al-Bagdadi's elaborate recipes contain liberal quantities of almonds, spices and fragrances and reflect the haute cuisine of the day. The modern English favourite bread and butter pudding, with its classic ingredients of cinnamon, nutmeg, lemon zest, sultanas, cream and eggs, is clearly medieval and aristocratic in origin.

Şirvanî's additional simpler dishes, on the other hand, are both practical and affordable and reflect the culinary habits of ordinary people. In *ekmek aşı* ("dish of bread"), he puts butter and water in an earthenware pot, adds small pieces of bread when the water is boiling, and stirs in a few eggs once the bread is soft, with a sprinkling of pepper to serve.

The Roman Apicius's *De Re Coquinaria* (*On the Subject of Cooking*), written in the 1st century AD, includes *Pultes tractogalatae*. *Tractum* is stale pastry or bread, and the dish was probably akin to porridge in consistency. Put a pint of milk and some water into a pot, break bread into it and simmer… Not so different from today's bowl of cereal or muesli doused in milk and bolted down before the dash to work.

In the 13th to 15th centuries strong cultural, economic and political connections developed between Baghdad, Tabriz, Konya, Bursa and Edirne, which led to these cities sharing a similar lifestyle and culinary repertoire for hundreds of years.

Today in Konya, capital of the medieval Anatolian Seljuk empire, a *tirit* is specifically prepared for guests arriving from afar on the eve of a wedding ceremony, to revive energy and spirits before festivities begin. The evening before their arrival, an animal is slaughtered, or several, depending on the size of the wedding, and the meat is left to simmer overnight in large copper cauldrons. The next day, large trays are filled with small pieces of the traditional bread made in the tandoor oven, and the meat is deboned and piled on top of the bread, ready to be basted with stock from the cauldron. Stock is ladled onto the bread until it is very soft. This ceremonial *tirit* is then kept on warm embers until lunchtime, ready to be enjoyed in the open air by groups of guests sitting round large trays.

The Black Sea port of Samsun is known for its goose *tirit*. The bird is cooked until tender and a rice pilav made with the stock. The shredded meat is scattered over the pilav and the dish served covered with sheets of paper-thin *yufka* pastry soaked in the remaining stock. This speciality is similar to the national dish of the nomadic Kirgiz, Kazakh and Tartar peoples, *Beshbarmak* (meaning five fingers, because it is eaten with the hand).

Gaziantep, in the heart of Anatolia, which is full of gastronomic treats and treasures, offers a slightly different *tirit*. Neck and shoulder of lamb is cooked for more than an hour in plenty of water until tender. Small squares of flatbread are fried and moistened with cooking stock, and the meat is taken off the bone and arranged on top with a good seasoning of black or red pepper. Some people enjoy the dish with a squeeze of lemon.

Kastamonu, another imperial centre, has *simit tiridi*, made not with bread but with *simit* rings without the sesame. The *simits*, preferably stale, are soaked in hot meat stock and eaten with garlic yoghurt. This speciality is also mentioned by Mahmud Nedim in *Ahçıbaşı* (*The Chef*), published in 1898. He explains that bakers sold *simit* rings the thickness of a little finger to the grand mansions of Istanbul specially for making *tirit*.

Yoghurt also complements *Ramazan kebabı*, which is prepared with leftover *pide* (pitta bread), baked specially in the month of Ramazan and traditionally eaten when breaking the fast. A shallow pan is lined with slices of *pide*, covered with mincemeat sautéed with onions and tomatoes, and eaten with yoghurt (see recipe). This humble *tirit* is surely the forerunner of Bursa's legendary *İskender kebab*, nowadays prepared with slices of döner kebab on thin flatbread, covered in tomato sauce and sizzling, fragrant Bursa butter. It is always served with creamy yoghurt poured over it, a feast for the eye as well as the palate.

Bursa also boasts an exquisite sweet delicacy made with bread: *vişne tiridi*, which resembles the British summer pudding but is prepared with ripe sour cherries in season, rather than berries. Mehmet Kâmil gives two recipes in his book *Melceü't-Tabbâhîn* (*The Rescue of Chefs*, 1844) with the name *vişne ekmeği* (sour cherry bread). In the first he pours sour cherry compote over bread fried in butter, and leaves the pudding to simmer until the liquid is absorbed and the remainder has turned to a treacle. In the second, toasted slices of *has ekmek* (the white bread traditionally made and sold by the palace) are simmered with sour cherries and sugar and served chilled. The dish can also be made with apricots or plums, he adds.

In his work *Yemek Risalesi* (*Treatise on Food*) of 1858, Ali Eşref Dede, a Mevlevi dervish sheikh from Edirne, also gives a sour cherry *tirit* recipe. He uses shop-bought *frangela*, white bread rolls. The dervishes evidently had a sweet tooth, for the sheikh's recipes includes several bread-based puddings made with fried slices of bread soaked in honey syrup and layered with clotted cream.

Among the several sweet treats listed by the Ottoman Şirvanî in the early 15th century is a bread pudding that gives strength, clears the mind and is fit for heroes. Preparation is simple: bread is soaked in milk or water, sprinkled generously with sugar and pounded almonds, coloured with saffron and gently simmered. He also gives a recipe for *kadayıf*, made with bread but much richer than the version of *ekmek kadayıfı* we have today in Istanbul, which is a spongy bread soaked in syrup and eaten with clotted cream (see recipe).

Ekmek kadayıfı and *İskender kebabı*, two of the great classics of today's Turkish cuisine, owe their ancestry to the humble *tirit*, whose delicious simplicity makes it so versatile and addictive. And it must surely have been the honest quality of the dish that attracted the accomplished Robert May when he included it in his recipes in 17th-century England.

İncik Kebabi
Lamb Shank Kebab

2 lamb shanks
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
Juice of half a lemon
2–3 cloves of garlic
1 sprig thyme
Bread slices (preferably stale)

Tirit was a common dish in dervish lodges: nutritious, economical, tasty and popular with members young and old. This recipe comes from the Edirne Sufi sheikh Ali Eşref Dede's 1858 *Treatise on Food*. In his chapter on stews, all the meat dishes are prepared *tirit*-style on slices of bread.

There would have been many mouths to feed in dervish lodges and cooks would have thrown all available sources of protein into the pot. In his recipe for lamb shank stew, the sheikh cooks lamb, beef and chicken together. This adapted recipe uses only lamb, though you could try a mixture of all three.

1 Rinse the lamb shanks, pat dry with kitchen roll and season with salt and pepper.
2 Heat the oil in a fireproof casserole and brown the meat on all sides. Add 2 glasses of water, the lemon juice, garlic cloves and thyme. Bring to the boil.
3 Simmer, covered, over a moderate heat, or braise slowly in the oven for 1–2 hours, checking occasionally.
4 When the meat is tender and falling off the bone, transfer the whole to a plate and allow to cool a little.
5 Add a glass of hot water to the cooking liquid in the casserole and return to the heat. When it is boiling, drop the bread slices into the liquid, turn down the heat and simmer until most of the sauce is absorbed. Share the slices among individual plates.
6 Remove the bones and spread the meat over the bread, spoon over the remaining sauce from the casserole. Add a generous sprinkling of extra pepper, and serve with a green salad and a good red wine.

Ramazan Kebabi
Pitta Bread Kebab

Pitta bread (preferably stale)
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
250g minced meat (beef or mutton)
Salt and pepper
1 or 2 green peppers, chopped
1 large ripe tomato, cubed
1 tablespoon butter
Yoghurt
1 clove garlic (optional)

This recipe requires the special thick *pide*, or pitta bread, that Turkish bakers produce in the month of Ramazan. People tend to break their fast every evening with fresh *pide*, so this kebab is usually prepared with the previous night's leftovers. A similar recipe from imperial Bursa, also known as *pideli kebab*, is prepared with meat stew and its spicy stock, rather than with mince and water. It is deliciously rich. Our family version is lighter, quick to prepare with ingredients to hand, and also very tasty. It is so popular that I even keep some *pide* from Ramazan in the freezer so that I can make this dish at other times.

1 Cut the bread into bite-size chunks and line a shallow pan or non-stick frying pan.
2 In a separate pan heat the olive oil and sauté the onion until soft. Add the meat, season with salt and pepper, and fry, stirring, until it is browned and crumbling. Add the green pepper, then the tomato, and fry a little more. Remove from the heat.
3 Pour the mixture over the *pide*. Add a glass or so of hot water at the side of the pan, dot the top with butter, and simmer, covered, on a low heat for 5 to 10 minutes.
4 Once all the juices have been absorbed, check that the bread is really soft and moist. If not, add more hot water, taking care to do so at the side so as not to disturb the top.
5 Serve piping hot with a generous dollop of creamy yoghurt. You can also use garlic yoghurt: to do this, pound the garlic with a pinch of salt in a bowl and mix with the yoghurt.

Paça Tİrİdİ
Trotters on Toast

6 lamb's trotters
2 or 3 cloves garlic
1 celery stalk (optional)
Juice and rind of half a lemon
Salt and pepper

Terbiye sauce:
2 cloves garlic
1 egg
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons wine vinegar

Paprika butter:
2 tablespoons butter
Red paprika flakes

Bread slices (preferably country bread)

This rustic dish, possibly originating on the Asian steppes, is comforting and warming on winter days. Other versions include sheep's head with trotters (*kelle paça*) and tripe (*işkembe*). In Istanbul, trotters are sold by the piece in special offal shops.

1 Wash the trotters under running water and place in a pressure cooker. Peel the garlic and add it along with the celery stalk and the lemon juice and rind, season with salt and pepper, and fill the pan with water to cover the ingredients properly. Cook for about 45 minutes. In a conventional pan it will take more than an hour – check frequently and add more water if needed.

2 When the meat is cooked and falling from the bone, strain the contents of the pan into a sieve placed over another, clean pan. Discarding the bones, lemon rind and celery stalk, return the meat to the liquid.

3 To prepare the *terbiye* sauce, pound the garlic to a pulp in a mixing bowl with a pinch of salt. Break the egg into the bowl and beat with a fork. Add the flour, spoon in the vinegar and keep mixing until all the ingredients are incorporated.

4 Carefully spoon the hot broth from the pan with the trotters into the egg mixture, mixing all the time until the sauce has warmed up to prevent the egg curdling.

5 Pour the warm egg sauce into the pan, and cook, stirring a little more, until the *terbiye* thickens. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

6 Toast the bread and place two slices in each soup plate.

7 Melt the butter and add the paprika flakes.

8 Ladle the hot trotter soup over the toasted bread, drizzle the paprika butter over the top and serve without delay.

Ekmek Tatlisi
Eggy Bread Pudding

About 6 slices of bread (preferably stale)
2 eggs
Half a tablespoon flour
1 glass milk
Olive oil
2 glasses (500ml) water
1 glass (200g) sugar
Walnuts, crushed (optional)

This recipe is practical because it takes minutes to prepare and is just as delicious as the special spongy crumpets known as *yassı kadayıf* sold in shops, which are prepared in exactly the same way. Walnuts add welcome crunch.

1 Break the eggs into a deep bowl and beat a little. Add the flour and mix well, then pour in the milk and keep mixing.

2 Drop the slices of bread into the mixture and make sure both sides are coated.

3 Heat the oil and fry the slices on both sides until golden. Arrange them side by side in a deep serving platter.

4 Boil water with sugar into a syrup. While still piping hot, pour over the eggy bread and leave to cool and absorb the syrup.

5 Sprinkle with walnuts when serving.

Vİşne Tİrİdİ
Bread and Sour Cherry Pudding

500g sour cherries (fresh or frozen)
1 glass (200g) granulated sugar
2 glasses water
Half a loaf of bread (white)
'Kaymak' or crème fraîche

The excellent book *Bursa Mutfağı* (*Bursa Kitchen*, 2009, in Turkish only), by M Ömür Akkor, lists this speciality from imperial Bursa as *vişne ekmeklisi*, and offers a perfectly practical recipe of stale bread slices laid in an oven dish, covered with a compote of sour cherries and baked. It can be served either hot or chilled. The hot version would be delicious with ice cream. Mehmet Kâmil, writing in the first half of the 19th century, fries slices of white bread in butter before pouring the cherry compote over them and simmering over a gentle heat.

This family version, which we have always called *vişne tiridi*, I inherited from my mother and grandmother. A serving dish is lined with toast, the hot cherry compote is poured over and it is eaten chilled with *kaymak*. For texture and flavour, a good-quality sourdough bread is best.

1 If using fresh cherries, remove the stalks, rinse and leave in a colander to drain. I don't bother to stone them (frozen sour cherries have no stones).

2 Bring the sugar and water to a boil in a deep pan, then add the cherries. Turn down the heat, poach until the fruit begins to crack, and remove from the heat before the cherries lose their shape.

3 Slice the bread finger-thick, remove the crust if it is thick, and toast.

4 Line an elegant serving dish snugly with the toast. Gradually spoon hot compote over, allowing the toast to absorb the juice, and arranging the cherries evenly on top. While it is cooling, keep adding compote as the bread absorbs the juice, until it is fluffy and oozing.

5 When cool, cover and store in the fridge until needed. Serve cut into wedges with *kaymak* or crème fraîche.

Ekmek Kadayifi
Bread Pudding with Treacle

Small kadayıf bread (300g)
2 glasses (400g) sugar
3 glasses water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
'Kaymak' or clotted cream

Alexis Soyer, the celebrated French chef at London's Reform Club, enjoyed this dessert at a festive dinner in Istanbul after the Crimean War. In a letter to *The Times* in 1856 he included "*ekmekataive*" in a long list of Turkish dishes he considered "worthy of the table of the greatest epicure". Akin to treacle pudding, *ekmek kadayıfı* can be bought ready-made by weight in baklava and pudding shops. To prepare it at home it is best to buy the special dry *kadayıf* bread sold in Turkish shops – flat round loaves that turn spongy when soaked in syrup and give the dish its delicious texture.

1 Halve the loaf, saving half for another time. Place it in a large baking tray with a rim, as the bread will expand. Pour over hot water to cover, place a lid on top and allow to soak and soften for about 30 minutes.

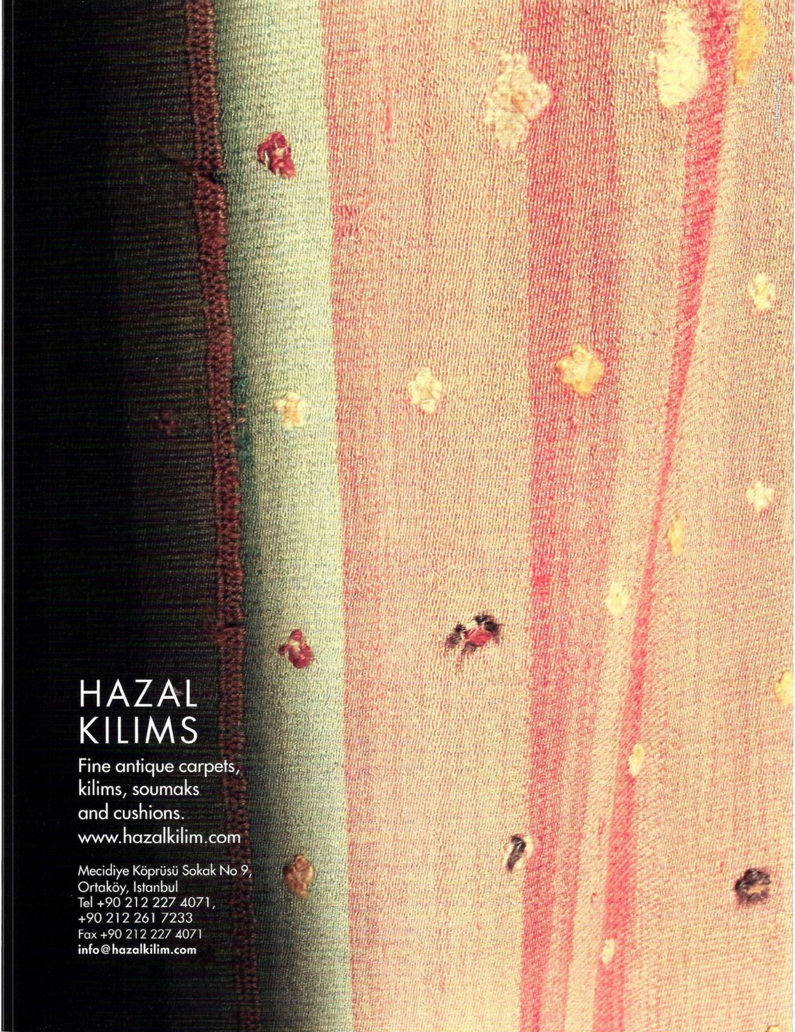
2 Drain and gently press the bread to remove excess water. Leave to cool.

3 Make a syrup with the sugar and 3 glasses of water. Bring to a rolling boil, add the lemon juice and pour over the bread.

4 Place the tray over a low heat. Leave to simmer, basting the bread regularly to absorb the boiling syrup, which will thicken slightly.

5 When cold, cut the *kadayıf* into wedges. Serve upside down to expose the lightly caramelised bottom, and top with a generous helping of cream. ◆

Berrin Torolsan, bt@cornucopia.net.
For cookery articles from past issues, see cornucopia.net/cookery



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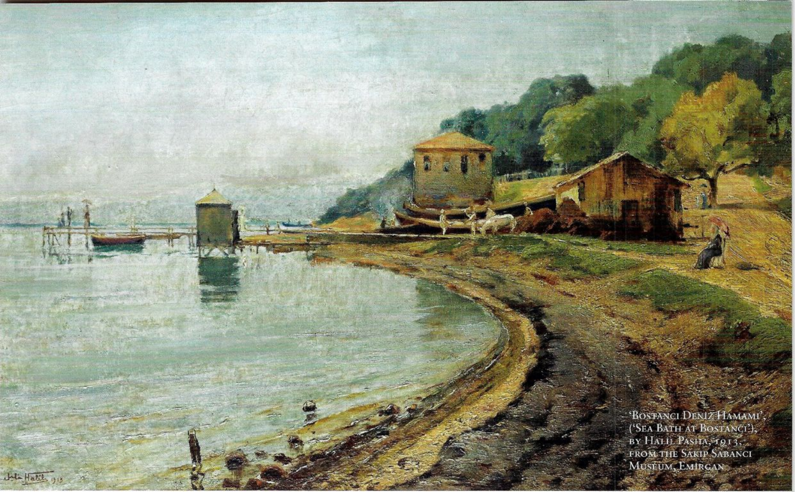

'Bostanci Deniz Hamami', ('Sea Bath at Bostanci'), by Halil Pasha, 1913, from the Sakip Sabanci Museum, Emirgan

GOING WITH THE FLOW

Alice Greenway went to Istanbul to study Turkish and learnt to love swimming in the Bosphorus while she was at it

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24 Rachel Senior GBR 1:04:52
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26 Alice Cornwell USA 1:05:53
27 Catherine Van Hoorde BEL 1:06:24
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29 Şener Aygün TUR 1:07:54
30 Clarian Bottinga NED 1:08:42
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TIM CORNWELL

Kuzguncuk Plaji

"We need to get you into the Bosphorus." The Ottoman scholar and Cornucopia correspondent Caroline Finkel takes charge, making a date to meet at the local Kuzguncuk *plaj*. I'm thrilled. I am one of those people who are addicted to swimming and find it hard to pass any inviting body of water without launching myself in. By the following week I'm registered to swim in 2013's annual Bosphorus Cross-Continental Swimming Race. But, stepping down from the crumbling sea wall onto a wet, weedy rock, I find myself on the edge of a raging current. Up close, the Bosphorus rushes past in eddies and ripples, washes around my ankles and slaps hard against the shore. "Aren't you going in?" Caroline asks.

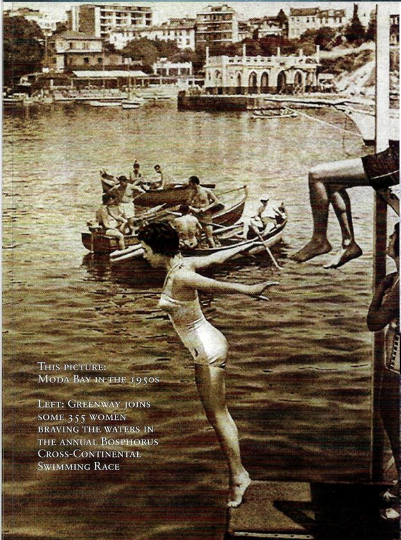
Having recently waymarked a long-distance trail following the hoofprints of the great 17th-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, Caroline is now trailblazing walks in the outskirts of the city – a bid to make Istanbullus aware of their countryside before it disappears.

I hate to disappoint. But the only current I have swum in that comes close is a tidal river in Massachusetts where my nephew once got swept out to sea and had to be rescued by kayakers. I peer downstream. If I am pulled out by the current here I'll be carried down through the busy ferry traffic at Üsküdar, right past the Maiden's Tower, and out towards the Sea of Marmara.

Luckily for me, Caroline has brought along another friend, the former journalist

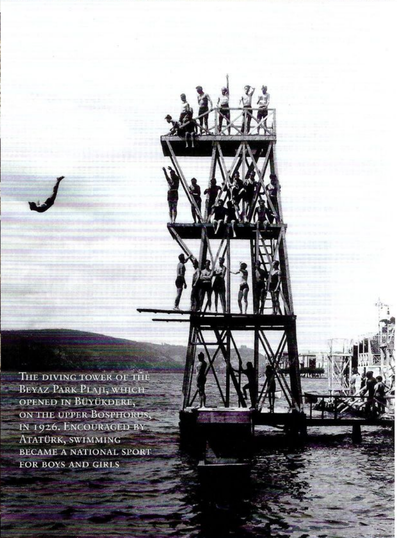
YAPI KREDİ SELAHATTİN GİZ COLLECTION (BOTTOM RIGHT); ALICE GREENWAY (TOP)

Leaping into the Bosphorus: a rite of summer – though not often, these days, for women and girls



This picture: Moda Bay in the 1950s

Left: Greenway joins some 355 women braving the waters in the annual Bosphorus Cross-Continental Swimming Race



The diving tower of the Beyaz Park Plajı, which opened in Büyükdere, on the upper Bosphorus, in 1926. Encouraged by Atatürk, swimming became a national sport for boys and girls

Aygül Özkaragöz, who spent her childhood summers in Kuzguncuk and used to swim from the *rıhtım* (quay) in front of her yalı (waterfront house). If you stick close to the foundations of the yalıs, Aygül demonstrates, there is a slight back current. I jump in to follow her, swallowing mouthfuls of Bosphorus sent in by the swell of a passing container ship. We manage to swim up two weedy house-lengths before being swept back down.

Just then, to my delight, two skinny boys come by, floating fast downstream, followed shortly by two more boys with an inner tube. Cheerily they kick in to take a short rest, eye us with curiosity, before launching themselves back downstream. Twenty minutes later, we see the same boys walking back up along the road in bathing suits and bare feet, carrying the inner tube. When I look up, a huge, dark-grey submarine is making its way midstream towards the Black Sea. Because of the tricky currents, submarines are forced to surface when travelling up and down the strait.

The Kuzguncuk *plaj* (or beach, from the French *plage*) is a dusty plot of land that slopes down to the strait – just a short walk upstream from the famed İsmet Baba fish restaurant. It is bordered on one side by a house, while on the other a stone wall topped by a wire fence juts out into the water, protecting against the north wind and current and providing a place where swimmers can hang their clothes from a single strand of barbed wire.

This Friday two women sit in the shade of two trees picnicking while their children, boys and a girl, dabble in a shallow pool dug amongst the weedy rocks. They offer us Fanta and *simit* when we come out of the water.

Now a large, smiling, effusive man in a red bathing suit is standing out on the rock at the end of the stone wall, making large circular movements with his arms. The *plaj* has its own particular eddy, he says. If you swim upstream, then directly out into the strait, this eddy will carry you back in. Putting one arm forward and one against his side, he dives in to demonstrate.

A retired restaurant worker, Orhan spends most days here, swimming and sunning and looking after the place. He digs out the shallow swimming hole, scrapes the weed off the rocks, picks up glass from broken beer bottles and cleans mussels. He parks his 1970s olive-green Mercedes at the edge of the road. "You can tell a lion from where he sleeps," he boasts.

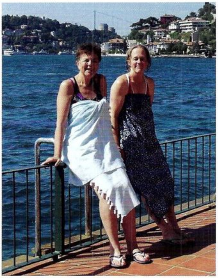
No one is sure who owns this plot of land or why it remains empty. "Perhaps the city owns it, perhaps the nearby Armenian church has a share. Perhaps it's a disputed piece of land," Orhan says. It has served as the local beach for at least 50 years. Born and raised in Kuzguncuk, he remembers when Üsküdar had its own sandy beach near the lighthouse and there was a single tramline coming up the coast. He and the other boys would swim down, then run and hang on to a moving tram to catch a free ride back up.

And yes, Orhan says, it's good that women come to swim here. He promises to keep unruly boys in order.

"Now you have a friend and lifeguard," Caroline informs me contentedly.

TWO CONTINENTS, ONE RACE

Despite this initiation, it is with some alarm that I find myself, early the following Sunday, dressed in bathing suit and numbered cap – 319 – filing along with hundreds of other swimmers onto one of the two ferries that will take us up the Bosphorus. We have been issued with disposable, hotel-style slippers. Electronic tags Velcroed to our ankles will clock our times.



TIM CORNWELL

ALICE GREENWAY WITH HER SWIMMING PARTNER AYGÜL ÖZKARAGÖZ, AFICIONADO AND NAVIGATOR OF CURRENTS

ALICE GREENWAY

A PARK IN KUZGUNCUK, WHERE INTREPID MALES GATHER TO CATCH THE RAPID CURRENTS

July is the hottest month in Istanbul and I am already feeling dehydrated and anxious. Although practised in "wild swimming" as it is now called, I've never in my life taken part in an organised sporting event. As the engines start, a welcome breeze wafts through. Someone shouts and chants go ricocheting between the two boats. "*Her yer Taksim. Her yer direniş.*" Everywhere Taksim. Everywhere resistance, swimmers shout in support of the protests that had shaken Turkey recently – sparked by government plans to bulldoze a beloved park at Taksim Square. Other slogans I am learning that summer are *özgürlük* (freedom), and *boyun eğme* (don't bow your head).

The Bosphorus Cross-Continental Race, celebrating its 28th year in 2016, began informally in 1988, when 64 men and four women from a local swimming club raced the narrowest stretch: 700 metres from Anadoluhisarı to Bebek. Today it is run by Turkey's Olympic Committee and more than 1,500 swimmers from all over the world participate. This morning, with all shipping put on hold for three hours, we will swim 6.5km, from the pretty town of Kanlıca on the Asian side, just north of the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, down to Kuruçeşme Park in Europe – places I'm still having trouble pronouncing.

The boat I'm on ferries the older swimmers, distinguished by our yellow caps, numbered according to age, while the younger swimmers wear green caps. There's a festive mood on board, with men slapping each other on the back as if meeting in a coffee shop. For the 875 Turkish swimmers, competition to enter is fierce. Contestants swim 800m heats, and almost half are eliminated. As a foreigner I was required to provide a signed bill of health from a doctor and a letter from a certified coach. Only 355 of the swimmers are women – just 23 per cent.

As we steam upstream towards Kanlıca, old-timers pass out tips about how best to swim the Bosphorus. "See the eddies at Arnavutköy and Bebek – don't get caught up in those," one man tells me. "And don't get too close to Galatasaray islet."

The average current of the Bosphorus is 3–5km per hour, I've read in John Freely's classic guide, *Strolling Through Istanbul*. But "eddies producing strong reverse currents occupy most indentations of the shore". In addition, a subsurface current some 40 metres down runs in the opposite direction towards the Black Sea. This is said to be so strong that a fishing boat lowering its nets can be pulled upstream. And a strong south wind can reverse the surface current, making the race tricky.

"Swim right out to the middle," one man tells me. "You will feel where the water is coldest – that's where the strongest current is. Stay with it."

"If you find yourself too close to the Kuleli military high school [distinguished by its tall, peaked towers] you won't get across in time," another warns.

Soon we are filing off the ferry. I find myself squeezed between an Indian professor of robotics and a man who tells me that he grew up along the Bosphorus but didn't learn to swim until he moved to New Zealand. The American ambassador, cap no 051, is just ahead, crushed in with the rest of us, wearing nothing but his bathing suit and goggles.

We plunge off the starting pontoons like a great herd of seals, our Velcroed timers activated by an electronic strip. At first, the trick is not to land on top of anyone or get kicked. But so vast is the Bosphorus – 3.5km at its widest – that before I pass under the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, I am completely alone, with only a single elbow rising out of the water here and there for company, and a glimpse of a yellow or green cap, but all quite far off. The water is an ethereal yellow colour, surprisingly clean and not very salty. I peer down into it. (When I swim the race again in 2014, a thunderstorm will have washed much of the city's trash into the strait and it will not be so clean.)

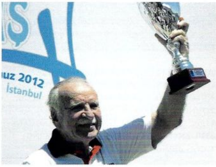
Looking up, I have a moment of panic. But there is the Kandilli radio tower straight ahead and, far downstream, I can see the large hot-air balloons floating above the finishing pontoons. I remind myself that I love swimming. This is what I wanted – not to join the race particularly, but to be here, swimming in the middle of the Bosphorus.

Now I am gazing up at the crenellated towers of Rumelihisarı, built by the Ottoman conqueror Fatih Mehmed II, a castle whose strategic position earned it the nickname *Boğazkesen* (cut-throat), literally cutter of the Bosphorus. This is the narrowest, and at over 100m, the deepest part of the strait. The water becomes noticeably darker and faster. Bebek Bay and the small lighthouse at Arnavutköy shoot by too fast. I'm glad I can recognise them. I can feel this geography being seared into memory.

Swim *verev*, diagonally, across the current, Aygül had advised, using an old sewing term for a cross-stitch. So I start to cross over, my angle sharpening as I realise just how fast the current is. Going straight across, I swim *verev* against the current, but, with some despair, I realise I'm going to be swept right past the finish line. This is by far the hardest part of the race for me. Kicking back upstream, I barely move. There are half a dozen swimmers in the same position, who have overshot the finish line. But here we are, rounding the finishing buoy, clinging onto the pontoon, scrambling up the ladders. And I can see hundreds of other swimmers still coming in behind.

Crowding onto the pontoon, swimmers congratulate and hug each other. Many bemoan lost time spent fighting a strong reverse current just before the finish, around Galatasaray islet. As we file ashore, our times are already appearing on a huge electronic billboard. The winner, a Turkish man, Hasan Emre Musluoğlu, comes first for the fourth year in a row, with a time of 39.14 minutes. A Greek 16-year-old finishes in 41 minutes. The American ambassador, I note, took 1 hour and 12 minutes: coming in seven minutes behind me.

Back at the Kuzguncuk *plaj*, I show off my race cap and towel. Orhan and his friend Yusuf offer to take me upstream for a more local adventure. We walk up the road to a



COURTESY OF LEVENT AKSÜT

TIM CORNWELL

Top Levent Aksüt, aged 85, has become the poster boy of the 6.5km Cross-Continental Race, having swum in every event, bar one, since 1988
Above Swimmers climb out onto the finishing pontoon
Left Like a shoal of 'hamsi' heading into a net, swimmers thrash downstream from the starting point in Kanlıca, marked by colourful balloons

COURTESY OF LEVENT AKSÜT

ABOVE A SPECTACULAR DIVE OFF THE QUAY OF THE İSTANBUL YÜZME İHTİSAS KULÜBÜ, THE ADVANCED SWIMMING CLUB, FOUNDED IN ORTAKÖY IN 1943
OPPOSITE BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE STUDENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SHIPPING LANES BEING CLOSED DURING THE RACE

formal, landscaped park, plunge off the high sea wall and swim out into the current. Crawling out beyond the reach of fishing lines, Orhan in front, Yusuf behind, I am given a swimming escort back to the *plaj*. And this, I'm ashamed to admit, is even more fun than swimming in the race.

THE EUROPEAN SHORE

Aygül teaches me a new phrase: *Deniz kenarında buluşuyoruz* (We meet by the edge of the sea), and we make a date to visit the Sakıp Sabancı Museum and from there to explore swimming along the European shore.

From Ortaköy, through peaceful Arnavutköy, trendy Bebek, north to Tarabya, a sea wall winds its way alongside the busy road. From bus or ferry, you can see groups of boys and men leaping into the blue.

One of the most popular swimming places used to be just north of the museum entrance at Emirgan, with swimming ladders built into the sea wall every ten feet or so. But when the esplanade here was widened in 2015, all the swimming ladders were removed. It was a sad sight to see a few men struggling to lower a steel garden ladder into the water. Even if you are dexterous enough to pull yourself up boat fenders made of lashed trees, the widened walkway now juts out over the water, creating a gloomy cavern underneath. A better place for swimming is from the sea wall below Rumelihisarı, where a shady, tree-lined park allows for lounging and picnicking and where street vendors sell stuffed mussels and boiled corn on the cob.

Our problem is that we see no women swimming. Among a group of children, being watched by their grandfather on a bench, a girl wears clothes and dips in while her brothers leap in wearing bathing suits. The trouble, Aygül explains, is that there is no place to change. Girls do swim, but usually at the beach, where their families can keep an eye on them.

Aygül was 18 when she moved to Istanbul from Ankara. In the late 1960s there were many *kadınlar hamamı*, women's baths or changing cabins, she remembers, built out into the water on stilts: at Fenerbahçe (Lighthouse Garden), Moda, Caddebostan and at Tarabya (from the Greek name Therapeia, or therapy). They were square wooden cabins, she explains, approached along raised walkways. Inside each one there was no floor except for a gallery running around it with hooks for hanging clothes. "You could change and jump in. You couldn't really swim inside. It was too shallow. But I remember my cousins and I would swim underneath the raised cabins to get out."

Inside the Sabancı Museum, we find two paintings of *Deniz Hamamı*, Sea Bath. One by the Ottoman painter Halil Pasha shows a tall square structure jutting up in an idyllic bay lined by a market garden. In the other, by Sami Yetik, a 20th-century painter, two sea baths stand out in the surf of a storm, looking as though they might be swept away. In the distance a steamship passes by.

It is on another trip, further up the Bosphorus, just past Yeniköy, that I stumble across what may be the most dramatic and beautiful and welcoming swimming spot in Istanbul. Here, the Bosphorus opens wide as it begins to approach the Black Sea. You can amble along the grand sea wall, opposite the Austrian consulate, passing under huge plane trees, and leap in wherever the urge takes you. You will then, along with other swimmers, be swept fast round the gently curving *burun*, or nose, back down into a distinct swimming bay. Best of all, although we are in the minority, both women and girls appear to be welcome to swim here.

ALICE GREENWAY

"It used to be all Bosphorus people who lived in yalıs", a friend of Aygül's says ruefully, when we stop for tea and cake. She grew up in Emirgan. "People here used to be in touch with the sea. They had rowing boats. They would take their boats out and swim. Now they are newcomers. The houses aren't lived in. Now people go elsewhere in summer, or swim in their pools." She asks not to be named in case this insults her neighbours. Because of Turkish custom, by which houses are passed down to all descendants, she says, too many people wind up owning part of a house, and eventually they have to sell.

She has a point about wealthy Istanbul. Catching the tourist hop-on-hop-off ferry from Emirgan back across and down the Asian side, we pass beautiful mansions with shuttered windows and empty gardens. But boys and men are jumping in from every public space, every park or informal *plaj*, every pier or staircase leading down into the water.

THE BOSPHORUS BOYS

During my last week in Istanbul, Aygül and I decide to test out our new-found expertise. Too dignified to jump from the park, she arranges to meet at the yalı of her friend Mehmet Moralıoğlu. We agree to swim in sundresses over bathing suits, allowing us to walk up the road and back home.

Mehmet's yalı is the last house before the Bosphorus Bridge, just before the gates of the Naval Academy. Built by his grandparents, this 19th-century white wooden house has peeling paint, slightly sagging shutters and a small porch with stained-glass windows. Inside is an old piano, a chest of glassware and a grand wooden staircase originally from an older house. A pair of flippers rests against the bottom step.

Along with the older Ottoman yalı next door, the property has been in the family for at least five generations, Mehmet says. Many siblings share it, but they manage to hold on to it. Mehmet grew up swimming the Bosphorus and would often swim down to Kuzguncuk and back. He doesn't do it much any more because it's dirty. We've been lucky this month because of a steady north wind, he says. A south wind brings garbage floating back up and swarms of jellyfish.

Undeterred, Aygül and I perch on the wall at the edge of his garden, shaded by plum trees dripping with fruit, a broad-leaved fig tree and a tall daphne. *Çivileme*, Aygül instructs, meaning jump like a nail, which she will do. I am to *balıklama*, dive like a fish. We plunge in and swim out to avoid the lines of men fishing from the parks downstream. The current grows faster the further out we go. We are swept down past the small wooden Üryanizade mosque, its minaret jutting up like a lighthouse; past a girl lounging by a small private pool; past pretty wooden houses overhanging the water. "They've never seen anything like it!" Aygül shouts as someone on shore stops to take our photo.

It is late afternoon, and the sun is starting to dip in the sky. Far downstream, we see the outlines of the glorious domes and minarets of Sultanahmet, of Topkapı Palace, the Süleymaniye and the Yeni Cami. I think of the protesters' word, *özgürlük*, freedom, as I realise I am no longer scared of being swept away. I am thinking of how much fun I've had at the Kuzguncuk *plaj* and the importance of small, shady, open spaces, whether beaches or parks or vegetable gardens, and the happiness they can give.

"Shall we come with you?" a group of boys shout out as we pass, jumping in behind us. We laugh.

Aygül and I, two mature women, floating in sundresses, have joined the ranks of the Bosphorus boys. ◆

Alice Greenway, a frequent visitor to Istanbul, is the author of 'White Ghost Girls' (2006) and 'The Bird Skinner' (2014)

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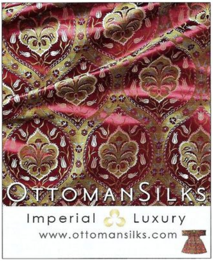

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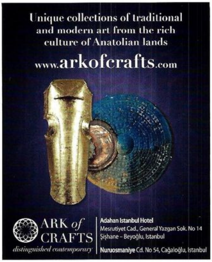

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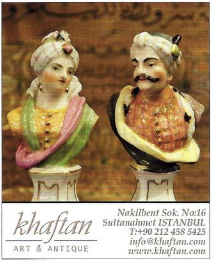

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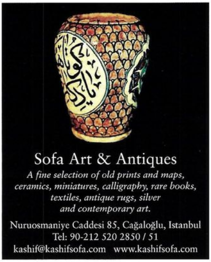

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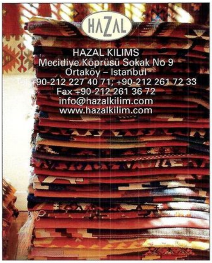

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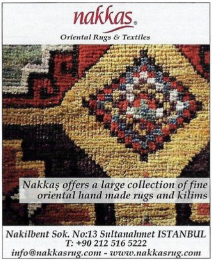

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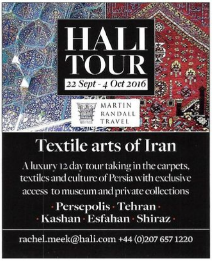

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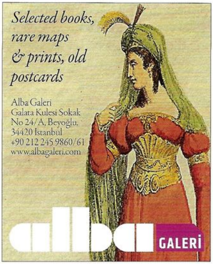
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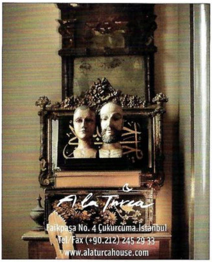
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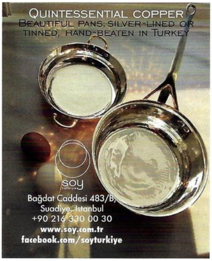
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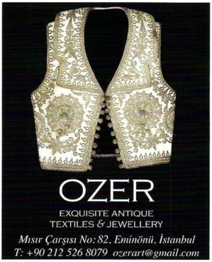
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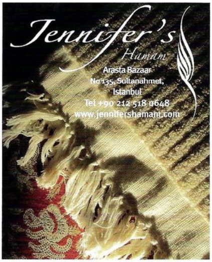
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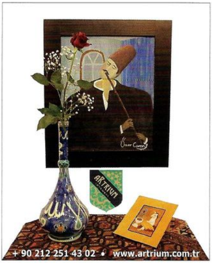
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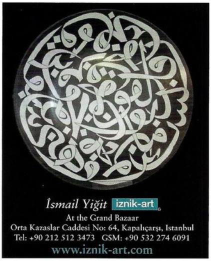
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Village Voices

Record-breaking snowstorms see Azize Ethem thankful for her cheery wood-burning stove. As the new bridge and highway bring swarms of speculators and developers to Iznik, gentrification threatens. There is talk of ecotourism, a rash of new, bijou houses, and – to everyone's amazement – a café for women. Thank heavens for the hamam, where all such unwelcome thoughts can be set aside

This winter we have had even more snowstorms than last year, which was said to be a record-breaking season. Friends living in the hills beyond Yalova had a crisis when snowed in for a week: they ran out of coffee. My kitchen wood stove has been working overtime keeping the house warm. This magical Bulgarian contraption pumps hot water through the radiators as well as giving me the pleasure of watching a wood fire through the glass door. Sitting at my kitchen table beside a glowing fire, looking out onto otters playing in the lake beyond the snow-covered lawn takes some beating. And the abundant snow and rain mean the reservoirs are full and, more selfishly, that the lake will be high in summer, so I will be able to moor my little dinghy at the edge of the lawn.

Beyond my gate things are abuzz. With the Izmit Bay Bridge and new highway nearing completion, we are suddenly on the map for land speculators and new business ventures. Local government bigwigs in Bursa have erected signs here, there and everywhere welcoming passing souls to Iznik. They have even gifted us a large ferry boat, which all summer sailed back and forth between Iznik and Gemlik. I haven't met anyone who has used it and can't think why anyone would.

Our Tourist Information Office (or rather shed), which I never once saw open, has been torn down and a very modern glass structure is to be built. The perfectly adequate public loos have gone, presumably to be replaced by something more fitting to a town on its way up. The main road was closed for months as it was slowly resurfaced, while side roads are being repaved following no apparent plan or system.

The 14th-century Süleyman Pasha Medrese, restored a few years ago, is strangely to be restored yet again. At present the chambers originally built for students are occupied by artisans producing Iznik ceramics. I have a horrible feeling it will be turned into a restaurant or something more profitable than our local ceramicists.

There has been much publicity about the ecotourism project being established in the hills above Iznik – a row of 14 A-frame bungalows – all plastic, metal and cement, looking rather akin to chicken coops. The local consensus is that whoever is promoting this doesn't have a clue what ecotourism is.

Like all Turkish towns, we have a plethora of teahouses catering to the male of the species, but never anywhere for women to take a break from shopping. Well, there is now. What is the world coming to?

Closer to home, just a mile away, are the Ilıca springs and tepid pool. Mainly used by the locals, it is a large, enclosed pool with fresh mineral water bubbling up from the gravel bottom. After paying my two-lira entrance fee, I have spent many an afternoon floating in its restorative waters, but I fear no more. The waters are to be tamed, a spa hotel is to be built, probably in an eco-friendly style, and every therapy known to man will be available. I doubt if we locals will be welcome, let alone able to afford it.

With huge industrial sites mooted for the Yalova and Izmit areas and the gentrification of Iznik, men calling themselves real-estate agents are flocking in from far and wide. They arrive in gleaming vehicles, wearing suits and city shoes, and leave with themselves and their cars covered in mud. Locals have quickly gone into business to assist these speculators, with Osman, our jack of all trades and master of none, now renting an office with a real-estate sign in the window. They know we country folks are fools, so they arrive quite confident that they can buy up land at knock-down prices. Several of these gentlemen have discovered that the grey-haired foreign woman by the lake is not as stupid as they had thought. The teahouses have become centres for information exchange, and prices are going through the roof, so they are finding it trickier than they had expected. North of us, new, bijou residences have begun to dot the hills. It is all rather depressing. The thought of the Iznik lake, home to fishing boats, being clogged with speedboats and jet skis is too awful to contemplate.

Much is happening on the archaeology front. The 1,600-year-old Roman church discovered a metre and a half under water near the lake shore two years ago is causing much excitement. A few weeks ago a cache of 40 embossed coins was discovered. The Bursa Metropolitan Municipality has announced its intention to transform this basilica into a tourist attraction. I am sure there are local fishermen already converting their boats into glass-bottomed tourist craft.

In late November a magnificent seven-ton late-Roman sarcophagus, with exquisite pristine carvings of Eros, Nike, lions' heads and an omphalos, was found in a local olive grove. It has been moved to the museum for safety. Meanwhile archaeologists are still working on the Roman theatre and the ancient pottery kilns. Another team is excavating something behind the museum – exactly what is not known to the locals. It is all a bit cloak-and-dagger.

Yesterday my friend Dorothy and I made our spring pilgrimage to my favourite Turkish bath. There is nothing as hedonistic as a real Turkish hamam. Situated on a slight rise in the Bursa area of Çekirge, it is one of several dating from Byzantine times. Taking advantage of the piping-hot springs, the Eskikaplıca was rebuilt by Sultan Murad I Hüdavendigâr some 60 years after the Ottoman conquest of Bursa in 1326, and was restored four years ago.

After divesting ourselves of our layers of winter clothing and draped in towels, we gingerly make our way in wooden shoes to the hot room lined with marble benches. We soap ourselves and rinse with bowls of hot water scooped from constantly overflowing marble basins. Now clean, we are permitted to enter the pool in the centre of the room where fresh spring water gushes from a marble lion's mouth. Here we lounge as the heat wipes away tension and soaks into our muscles. Just when I feel as if my mind and body have turned to jelly, the staff help me to a marble slab, where I am soaped, rinsed and firmly scrubbed with a cloth akin to fine-gauge sandpaper. Finished, I totter off to the lounge area to cool off and muster the energy to dry myself and put all those clothes back on while my friend is sandpapered.

Now, with fruit trees flowering and a watercolour hint of green on the trees, it is time to tackle those spring chores in the house and garden. The woodshed door has to be painted and new gravel spread on the drive. Clad in waders, I'll collect the winter debris on the edge of the lake. Fishing floats, bottles and polystyrene will be gathered and driftwood saved for kindling. I live in what guests call paradise, but keeping it as such takes a lot of work. When visitors ask how I fill my time, I don't even try to explain. ◆

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Notes from a cool city

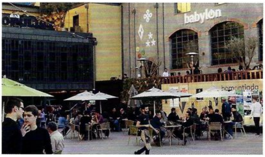
Emma Harper gives a rundown of Istanbul's hottest jazz venues. Photographs by Monica Fritz

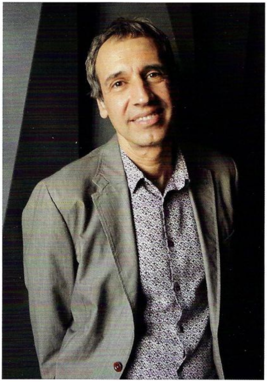
Istanbul has a robust music scene, with venues ranging from expansive concert halls to intimate jazz clubs and grungy bars. A good way to take the pulse of the city is to drop into one of the spots listed here for an evening of live music – you might never see Istanbul the same way again.

Babylon Bomonti – Şişli

Bomontiada, Birahane Sok 1, Şişli; +90 212 334 0190; babylon.com.tr. Tickets: biletix.com

The musical compass of Istanbul since opening in 1999, Babylon uprooted from its iconic space in Asmalımescit last year and moved to Bomontiada, a new arts complex in the impeccably restored Bomonti brewery. Despite the airy interior and a wall full of windows, it retains the intimate atmosphere that made the Asmalımescit space so electric. Babylon's regulars wouldn't have accepted anything less. You'll find this crowd crowing with delight to İlhan Erşahin's avant-garde saxophone riffs, and bouncing to the Turkish psychedelic beats of BaBa ZuLa. Stop by Kilimanjaro, with its aviary-inspired architecture, for dinner and a tipple before taking in one of the indie, rock, jazz or electronic gigs offered from September to May.





ALİ GÜLER

ALİ GÜLER

Top Önder and Zuhal Focan, creators of the Nardis Jazz Club
Above Selen Beytekin Project at Nardis
Above left Bomontiada, Babylon's new home
Left Ahmet Uluğ, Babylon's co-founder
Right and below Salon IKSV and hosts Egemen Eti and Deniz Kuzuoğlu

Salon IKSV – Beyoğlu

Nejat Eczacıbaşı Binası, Sadi Konuralp Cad 5, Şişhane; +90 212 334 0752; saloniksv.com. Tickets: biletix.com

Another heavy hitter on the Istanbul music scene is Salon IKSV, a chic black-box venue next to the Şişhane metro stop. The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts – the premier cultural organisation in Turkey – runs the show, so it's no surprise that the programme of jazz, indie and experimental music is expertly curated. The wide range of promising international musicians draws listeners from all walks of life: students, hipsters, professionals and eccentrics of all ages. Most shows are standing only, but it's a rare evening where you'll have to jostle for space.

Nardis Jazz Club – Galata

Kuledibi Sok 14, Galata; +90 212 244 6327, m +90 532 244 5778; nardisjazz.com. To book: call after 3.30pm (not Sunday) or email focan@nardisjazz.com

For a little more local flavour, head to Nardis Jazz Club near the Galata Tower. The guitarist Önder Focan and his wife Zuhal, who opened the club in 2002, have built a jazz empire with a rota of regulars: vocalists Selen Beytekin and Sibel Köse, two of the best jazz singers in Turkey, will seduce you with voices that are deep and rich (Köse) and silvery smooth (Beytekin), while Focan's own group

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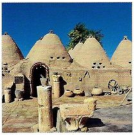

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Euphrates Tours started in Cappadocia in 1999, and have become one of Turkey's most reputable tour operators – now branching out into Croatia, Greece, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. Visitors are offered a very different view of Turkey, with off-the-beaten-track itineraries to complement the classic A-list sites. Recommended by both *Frommer's Turkey Travel Guide*, USA, and *Footprint Turkey Handbook: The Travel Guide*, UK.

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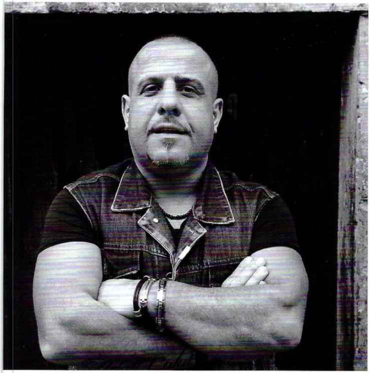
Funkbook, featuring the talented Şallıel brothers on saxophones, will have your feet tap-dancing under the table. Between local legends, young Turkish musicians and foreign jazz dignitaries, Nardis has a packed programme that offers music from Monday to Saturday almost year-round (the venue shuts in August). Concerts start late at this dark little lair, so there's no need to be prompt unless you want to linger over your scotch. Call ahead to book one of the venue's small tables – regulars snap them up quickly for weekend shows.

Arthere – Kadıköy
Ferit Bey Sok 3A, Kadıköy; +90 538 086 7691; facebook.com/arthere.com.tr. Free entry. Arrive early to secure a seat
Two venues in Kadıköy provide a more offbeat experience. Arthere, a small storefront turned art centre in the bohemian neighbourhood of Yeldeğirmeni, a short walk from the Kadıköy docks, typically hosts at least two concerts a month. The free spirits at Arthere are drawn to their spontaneous, collaborative shows – musicians of different nationalities come together, sometimes for the first time, to experiment and blur



the lines between genres.

The performances, though acoustic and free of charge, are impassioned – Omar Berakdar, the Syrian photographer who owns and runs the space, only works with artists who want to "perform for the joy of performing". Seating is limited in the intimate gallery-cum-café. Events start at a civilised hour – 7 or 8pm – but eat beforehand as the only refreshments are coffee, tea and home-made nibbles.

ABOVE THE BOUNCER AT KARGA
ABOVE RIGHT KARGA'S BARMAN
BELOW ENJOYING A SEAT IN THE AFTERNOON SUN AT KARGA
ABOVE LEFT OMAR BERAKDAR, THE SYRIAN PHOTOGRAPHER WHO FOUNDED THE GALLERY-CUM-CAFÉ ARTHERE
LEFT ARTHERE'S MANAGER, THE ARTIST ÖYKÜ DOĞAN

Karga – Kadıköy

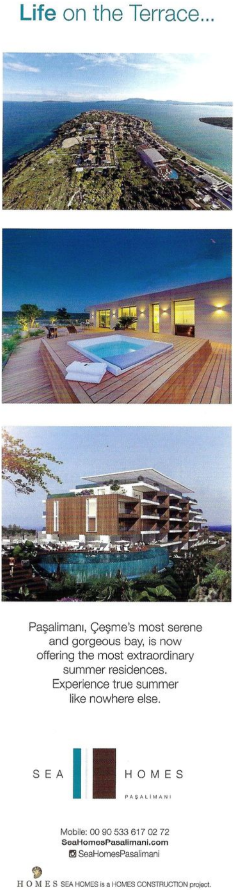
Kadife Sok 16, Kadıköy; +90 216 449 1725; kargart@kargart.net, karga.com.tr. Tickets sold at the door on the day. No credit cards

Karga (The Crow) is hidden behind an unassuming side door on Kadıköy's Bar Street (actually Kadife Sokağı), a 15-minute walk from the ferry. The only sign is a black crow above the door. Inside is a towering multi-storey bar with brick walls, the ceilings and staircase carved from rich, dark wood. In the afternoon, sunlight penetrates the old structure, giving you a chance to admire the details. But come nightfall Karga has a shadowy feel, attracting those outside the mainstream. Climb up to the crow's nest to find KargART, a gallery and performance space that opened in 2001, supporting independent and self-funded creatives. The boundary-pushing concerts range from indie and jazz to rock and reggae dubstep. Shows are mainly on weekend nights.

Backyard – Etiler

Bebeköy Sok 4, Otlukbeli Cad, Etiler; +90 212 287 1500. For programme, see instagram.com/backyardbynupeople. Free entry, but book ahead for a table

For fine dining and high-quality jazz, head to Etiler, only a short taxi ride from the Levent metro. Under the watchful eye of manager Başak Şahin Çetin, Backyard has blossomed into an upscale watering hole where high society can relax without the pressure to see and be seen. The vibe is very "garden party with your best friends" – Çetin's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AFOT programs develop a broad range of mutual interests including culture, education, literature, the environment, and the arts. americanfriendsofturkey.org

The American Turkish Society

Founded in 1949, and based in New York, this valuable not-for-profit organisation seeks to enhance economic, political and cultural ties between the USA and Turkey. The Society further supports Turkish arts and culture through its Moon and Stars Project. info@americanturkishsociety.org
www.americanturkishsociety.org

Moon and Stars Project

The **Moon and Stars Project** highlights the best of Turkish arts and culture in the USA supporting film, the visual arts, photography, education and music. **www.maspny.org**
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aim is to make her well-heeled clientele feel like they're at home. On Tuesday evenings in the summer you can enjoy dinner on the patio or a cocktail on the communal couches at the adjacent Backbar while listening to jazz musicians such as the powerful vocalist Ece Göksu performing live in the lush back garden. These evenings book up fast, so you'll need to reserve your table.

Istanbul jazz festivals

Istanbul Jazz Festival, caz.iksv.org; Akbank Jazz Festival, akbanksanat.com. Tickets: biletix.com

Live music in Istanbul hits its crescendo during the annual music festivals. The IKSV Istanbul Jazz Festival, which this year runs from June 27 to July 25, takes advantage of Istanbul's outdoor spaces, making it a bright spot during the sluggish summer months. The epic music of saxophonist and composer Kamasi Washington, who is performing on July 14 at Beykoz Kundura, an old shoe factory on the upper Bosphorus, will make you rethink the necessity of genres, while the silky vocals of Gregory Porter, who takes the stage at the Cemil Topuzlu Open Air Theatre in Maçka on July 25, will have you feeling loved-up.

And the fun doesn't stop there – this autumn will see the 26th Akbank Jazz Festival re-electrify the jazz scene in Istanbul after the summer break. ◆

For news and listings, see the online arts diary at cornucopia.net/events

Emma Harper is CORNUCOPIA'S *online arts editor, diary@cornucopia.net*

CORNUCOPIA'S RESTAURANT DIRECTORY

Listed online at www.cornucopia.net

AQUA – THE BOSPHORUS, ISTANBUL

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Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at the Bosphorus
Çırağan Cad No 28, Beşiktaş, Istanbul
+90-212 381 4059 www.fourseasons.com/bosphorus

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A serious restaurant with a seriously magnificent view of Izmir Bay, serving a distinguished modern menu in an elegant contemporary setting. Private dining for up to 40. Open for dinner 7–11pm. Closed on Sundays.

Swissôtel Grand Efes, Izmir
Gaziosmanpaşa Bulvarı No 1, Alsancak, Izmir
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Nişantaşı's favourite lunchtime spot prides itself on its 'New Istanbul Cuisine' and ingredients fresh from the market. The airy dining room, with its shop selling breads and prepared dishes, is now moving to swish Maçka Caddesi.

Maçka Cad, Reasürans Çarşısı 35/A No 16–60, Teşvikiye
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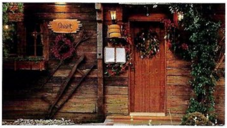

CHALET RESTAURANT – MAÇKA, ISTANBUL

A cosy winter treat full of Alpine atmosphere (from the last week of November). Enjoy fondue (Cheese, Chocolate or Chinoise) with a wide selection of wines by the light of a romantic log fire in this century-old chalet.

Swissôtel The Bosphorus Istanbul, Maçka, Istanbul
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SEASONS – SULTANAHMET, ISTANBUL

Turkish cuisine in a spectacular glass pavilion within the serene courtyard of this luxury hotel. Eat indoors or on the terrace. A sophisticated respite from the bazaars and monuments in the shadow of Ayasofya.

Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet
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LES AMBASSADEURS – BEBEK, ISTANBUL

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Bebek Hotel, Cevdet Paşa Cad No 34, Bebek, Istanbul
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ULUS 29 – ULUS, ISTANBUL

A breathtaking Bosphorus view and a menu full of invention (and the odd Turkish classic) secure the comfortably elegant Ulus 29 a place in the Istanbul pantheon. There's an intelligent cellar and sushi to boot.

Ahmet Saygun Cad, Ulus Park No 1, Ulus, Istanbul
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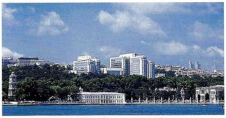

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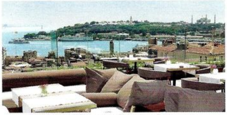

GEORGES HOTEL – GALATA, ISTANBUL

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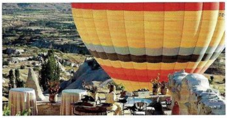

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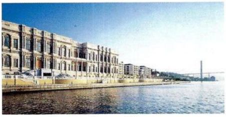

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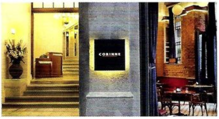

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Memories are made of this

Visiting a reincarnation of the once charmingly louche White Russian restaurant Rejans, Andrew Finkel sees his past flashing before his eyes

I sank my teeth the other day into a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup – a toxic whip I remember fondly from my childhood, which now tastes of indifferent chocolate, nuts, sugar and far too much salt. Certain foods, I decided, if not sampled at a young age, will never make sense at all.

A similar thought passed through my mind on an infinitely tastier occasion when I revisited a gastronomic landmark of my adolescence. For those of us knocking around Istanbul in the 1960s (and the following decades), Rejans was a portal to a pre-war universe. It was founded by White Russians in homage to a world they had left behind. It's not that the food was spectacular – although the borscht and beef stroganoff were pleasing enough. It was just different. Where else in those austerity years could one find duck on the menu – even if it had a consistency more suited to a child's bath? The far better Russian restaurant was Süreyya, up the Bosphorus, above the BP petrol station in Bebek. There the yellow vodka was cold and crisp; here it tasted of tomorrow's hangover. Yet there was something romantic about the pencil marks on the label of the bottle showing where you started drinking and when you'd had enough, so you could pay for the difference.

In time Rejans became almost completely severed from its roots. It was dull and noisy and not particularly cheap – and overtaken by any number of restaurants that served international cuisine – so when in 2011 it finally closed its doors, it seemed much too late to shed a tear.

Yet hearing that Rejans was risen from the grave, or at least reopening under new ownership, was an irresistible summons. I felt like a child listening to the Pied Piper as I traced my way up an alleyway off Galatasaray, and then through a narrow doorway and up a flight of stairs. The first glimpse of the revamped interior was genuinely exciting – familiar, but glitzier than in memory, with the shimmer of chandeliers and huge mirrors giving it the feeling of a dream. A fine collection of early Soviet paintings hung on the walls.

For what I suspect are copyright reasons the new establishment calls itself **1924** – the date of the first restaurant, which was to become Rejans. The food is certainly better than its predecessor's. Certain things stand out – the borscht has the sparkle of a good consommé and the *pelmeni* are light and flavourful and not the dour dumplings they can sometimes be. The duck was far from rubbery but a wee bit overcooked. Desserts were a pleasant surprise, including a "Fabergé" egg, with a hot vanilla custard melting away chocolate to reveal raspberry ice cream inside. There was lemon vodka, too (and cinnamon, and beetroot, even smoked-salmon-flavoured); this time *comme il faut*, from a chilled decanter.

Of course, 1924 plays off its own history. The banquettes along the walls have brass plates above them bearing the names of famous past customers – from Greta Garbo to Mata Hari – and there is a corner table set in perpetual readiness for Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, another habitué. It would be uncharitable to complain that this is invented tradition. It is more a gastronomic Museum of Innocence, an artful attempt not to recreate but to remember Istanbul's past. And if this means forcing me to chew over my own sense of nostalgia, it has done its job.

Curiously, my most cherished memory of Rejans was as a student, seated on my own one early evening, camouflaging my solitude by reading a book. The Russian waitress came over with motherly concern. "*J'aime lire aussi*," she said. "*Surtout des romans sur l'impératrice Marie-Thérèse.*" It seems that however much the molecular chefs fiddle with the enzymes on your fork, the molecules determining how much you enjoy an evening out are almost certainly the ones encoding memory in the brain.

1924 is the work of the group that changed, all too literally, the Istanbul diner's lookout on the world by perching their first restaurant, 360, on top of an inner-city building with that eponymous panoramic view. It is a principle adopted with good effect by **Efruz**, a glass eyrie at the very top of an otherwise nondescript hotel, in a side street off Taksim Square. "Efruz" means something like "sparkle", and it is a well-thought-out place. The owner, Serdar Akinan, is a popular journalist and documentary maker (over a quarter of a million follow him on Twitter) and he appears to have been inspired to create a clubroom that would appeal to friends. You can play "spot the columnist" most nights of the week.

The menu begins with Aegean-inspired meze with lots of vegetarian-friendly greens and legumes. And while you might expect to drink rakı here, Efruz really knows its wines. The food is decent, maybe no great surprises, but fairly priced. Worth the detour, though, are the relaxed atmosphere and the unexpected but spectacular Manhattan-style views. ◆

1924 (Rejans) Olivya Geçidi 7A,
Beyoğlu, Istanbul; +90 212 243 8360
or m+90 530 896 0360; 1924rejans.com
Efruz Billurcu Çıkmazı Sok 1/1, Beyoğlu,
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A small piece of paradise

Roger Norman relishes the delights of tending a small, secluded plot of land – a total contrast to the swathes of intensively farmed hectares around it. Tractors, ploughs and pesticides are banned, field mice, snakes and butterflies abound, and peace reigns supreme

The half-hour trip to our one-acre orchard sets off through a belt of peri-urban farmland where fields of tomatoes and Indian corn and sugar beet are tidily farmed by the local folk. Scattered farmsteads with decent barns, substantial woodsheds and two-storey houses indicate a certain prosperity, although the vehicles parked in the yards are pick-ups and old saloons that have seen better days.

One of the larger fields in this area – 30 or 40 hectares – has recently been the object of unusual and puzzling activity, with truckloads of imported topsoil heaped by JCBs into long earthen banks divided by troughs, according to a precise layout. Metal stakes and hoops have arrived, with rolls of tough plastic hose. Perhaps the raised banks are to be covered with polythene tunnels – or will there be a more permanent greenhouse structure? What will be grown? It would need to be something high-priced, and probably exotic, given the scale of investment. A while ago I spotted a man in uniform patrolling the precinct (it can no longer be called a field) with *Özel Güvenlik* (Private Security) blazoned in Day-Glo on his smart black jacket. A week later he had a prefab hut from which to keep an eye on things.

The road trundles on past the College of Agriculture, where rows of ancient tractors form an impromptu museum and as many girls as boys seem to attend as students. After a couple of miles of highway, the way plunges down to cross the Porsuk river, brimful every month of last year after the abundant spring and early summer rains. Here lies a village of 50 houses whose welcoming sign until recently claimed it to be the site of the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. Could be. Somewhere not far off, the Ottomans won their crucial Anatolian battles. But the sign was removed a year ago, suggesting a revision of this moment of history. After the village, we follow the boundary fence of the Department of Forestry, which manages several hundred hectares of perfectly tended tree nursery, employing swarms of day labourers (mostly women) to take care of the hoeing, weeding and planting. We tootle on, circling the NATO base, where there's reported to be a *Dr No*-style installation built deep inside the hill. Recruits eye the road from behind sandbags, rifles at the ready. Abruptly we find ourselves in a precipitous gorge, the sides of which rise in great piles of sandstone faintly recalling Monument Valley, made famous by John Ford. The scale's different, and in summer huge pumpkins are grown, which in Arizona wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell, but the towering outcrops dwarf the traveller with something of the same massive style. At the end of the gorge, there's a source of spring water, recommended for restoring the internal organs, cleansing the skin, slowing the ageing process, sweetening the breath, delighting the palate… and defeating death, perhaps. Two lead pipes protrude from the wall of a crude concrete trough, giving forth thin streams of crystal-clear water. It tastes good, although I don't seem to be getting any younger.

After the magic spring, the road enters a narrow steep-sided valley, divided into one-acre plots of alluvial loam as rich as you'll find anywhere. When I first happened on this secluded spot, I thought, "Good Lord [of whatever denomination], what a place for a garden!" A couple of years later, thanks to a slice of luck and a modest investment, we became owners of a one-acre plot in just that stretch that had delighted me. I won't let a tractor on it, or herbicides, pesticides or chemical fertiliser. The weeds are grateful for the absence of ploughs and herbicides, growing head-high by early summer and celebrating autumn in a chaos of dry stalks.

On this small paradise, which we share with butterflies and snakes in summer and an army of pretty field mice all year round, we planted 50 or 60 fruit and nut trees (half of them walnuts), keep a vegetable plot weed-free, water the crops with water channelled from a brook that's full and noisy in winter and no more than a narrow ribbon of moisture by late summer. As our fruit trees grew, making their own shade and finding their own water, the more laborious work tailed off, leaving me time to put up some sheds. I'm now making a stone-built cabin using rocks from the slopes and timber cut from the willows, wild cherries and poplars that border the stream. I'll put a wood-burning stove in there with a bed, a couple of shelves and a table, and write famous books in my dotage. Or not.

What was in my mind when I set out to write this letter was the contrast between the multi-milliard-funded, JCB-driven transformation of the field ten miles away and the sadly dwindling agricultural existence of the end-of-the-road village upstream from our *tarla* (field). The story there is not much different from that of countless other regions of the world. The modern world presses ahead and the small farms go under or get devoured by larger ones. With them goes the old peasant life, whose appeal to the go-getters survives in literary and cinematic nostalgia, from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* to *Manon des Sources*. Yet I hear from Greece that the lean years – the collapse of credit and the bankruptcy of businesses – have resulted (among harsher effects) in a steady stream of people returning to the land. The villages are reawakening, marginal lands are again under the plough. Former stockbrokers tend family olive groves and urban businessmen learn from grandpa how to grow potatoes.

The plight of the small farmer in an age controlled by mushrooming postmodern cities has not been much highlighted, because peasant farmers (*pace* Tolstoy) aren't writers, while journalists are urban folk or, if rural, comfortably so. Maybe the matter is also avoided because of its dismal inevitability. Small farms are uneconomic, subsistence farming an almost forgotten art. The only way to make a proper living from the land, farmers are informed (by agronomists, governments, banks) is to expand the acreage, mechanise the labour and get rid of the marginal stuff: cow, goat, vegetable garden, fish pond, hedges, hurdles, homebuilt *fırın* (oven) and so on. For a peasant, this means getting a bank loan, renting the neighbour's field, buying a tractor and catching up with the times. Why not? Agricultural loans – in Turkey and elsewhere – are not as hard to obtain as they were, there is often uncultivated land in small villages because of the families who have left, and even youngsters can handle tractors.

The problem, indiscernible to the urban eye, is many-sided. For a start, domestic animals, home-grown vegetables, a handful of fruit trees, chickens, ducks and dogs are by no means marginal pleasures for the traditional farmer. Just there lies the real enjoyment of village life. And then… borrow money? It goes against the grain. "Neither borrower nor lender be" is the old rural creed. Dress up smart and talk to bankers? Mortgage the old house? Ordeals almost worse than penury. "No, m'dear. We'd better stick to what we know." ◆

Roger Norman is a novelist and teacher living in Eskişehir; rnorman@anadolu.edu.tr

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